MAY/JUNE 1984 $2.00

Sierra Life

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HIGH SIERRA

The Memorial Mule • The Mount Whitney Trail • Cowboys in Bronze
Cerro Gordo • The Blue Canyon Gang • The Marmot • Parcher's Resort
Saddle City • Hard White Water • The Bishop Bagpipe Band • Cabin Fever

Liberty Cap and Nevada Falls, photo by Michael Pope.

From the Publisher

Our staff has gone through the usual trauma of producing another issue of Sierra Life. And, as usual, they've done a tremendous job.

On one of those late nights while we were all working on this issue of the magazine, we thought how much fun it would be to meet all of our readers, and to give you an opportunity to meet our production crew, writers, artists, photographers and some of the people we have written about.

With this in mind, I am extending a personal invitation to all of you to attend the 2nd. Annual Sierra Life Bluegrass Festival to be held here in Bishop on July 7th. (See page 25 of this issue for details.)

You'll enjoy a big Western B-B-Q and the best Bluegrass music you've ever heard. Mention that you read Sierra Life when ordering advance tickets, and take $1.00 off each ticket ordered. Or, bring a copy of Sierra Life with you, and get $1.00 off each ticket purchased at the gate.

We're looking forward to meeting all of you. See you July 7th!

Sandie Pramann
Publisher

Our Cover: Coyote Ridge in bloom, photograph by Michael Pope.

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Editors Corner

Bret Harte is one of my heroes. I like words, and he created a lot of new ones. When he came West, he first settled in Yreka, California. That town has always intrigued me, because I heard it got its name in the Gold Rush days when someone passed through and noted a sign flapping in the breeze: YREKA. This person didn't stay around long enough to learn that he'd seen the reverse side of a banner which was soon to say BAKERY. But the name stuck; Harte didn't. He went to San Francisco and got a job as a typesetter.

While setting type for others, he occasionally added some articles of his own to balance out the pages. I know how he felt. Sometimes no matter what you do, you're a column short.

Brimming with editorial integrity, I began my job last year as manager/typesetter for **Sierra Life.** I signed the oath to preserve, protect and promote the High Sierra. Then as deadline day approached, an article was missing, a photo negative got mailed back too early, the processor made confetti instead of copy. Someone handed me a piece of paper — I returned it without a glance, yelling, "If it fits, print it!" It was my grocery list.

I have a friend who once told me, for no apparent reason, that his letters were valuable. We lived in the same neighborhood at the time, and never corresponded. Now we are far apart. Every Christmas he sends me a brief note and a photo, it seems always with a new child added. His notes *are* valuable; keeping in touch with an old friend.

Sometimes **Sierra Life** gets caught between the Bakery and the grocery list. But we're still at it, keeping you in touch with our old friend, the majestic Sierra. As Mr. Harte wrote, "Thar ain't no sense in gittin' riled." If we miss an issue now and then, it's not for lack of trying. Jest lookin' to keep th' value up.

M.T.

Letters to the Editor

"My congratulations to Mike Mc Wherter for the outstanding article on the mountain lion in your Jan/Feb issue". . . "very educational and a pleasure to read. I look forward to reading more of his wildlife articles."

S. James
Newport Beach, CA

". . . I've never read a more interesting magazine anywhere. Please enter my subscription and keep up the good work."

M. Knight
San Francisco, CA

"Really enjoyed your stories about 'Western Men and Desert Gold' in the Jan/Feb issue. I would love to meet the gentlemen who wrote them!"

C. Powell
Costa Mesa, CA

Ed. Note: Come to Bishop on July 7th. for the Second Annual Sierra Life Bluegrass Festival and we'll introduce you!

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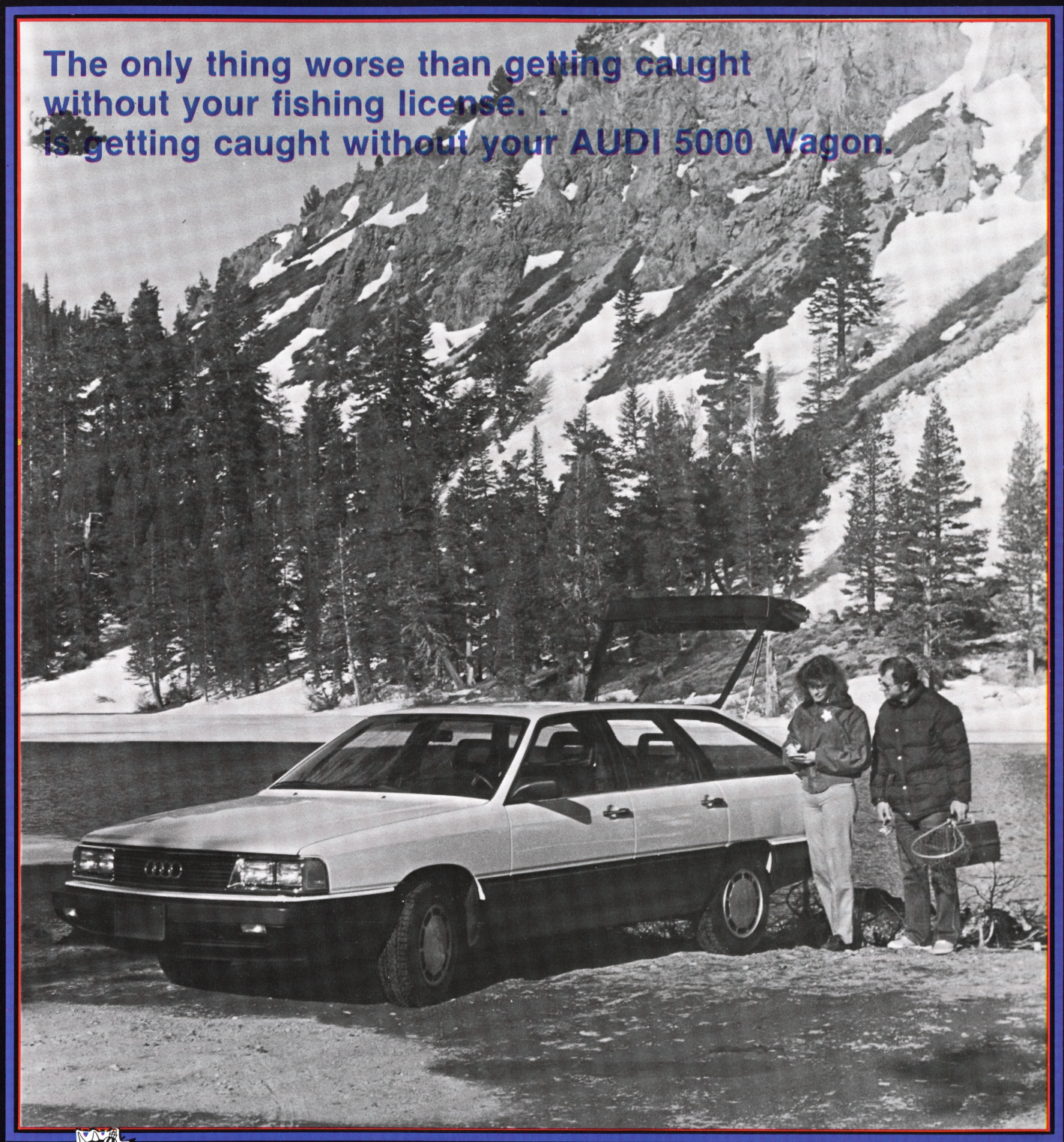

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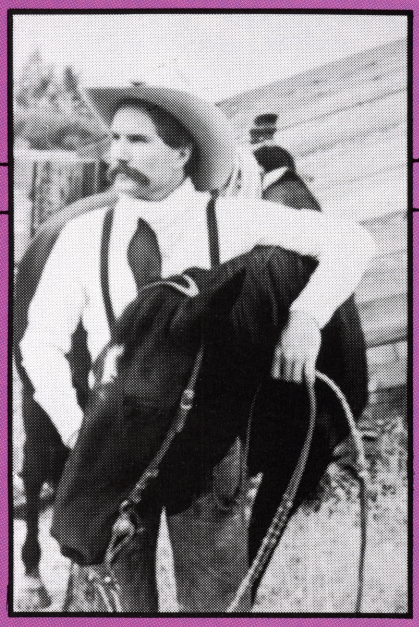

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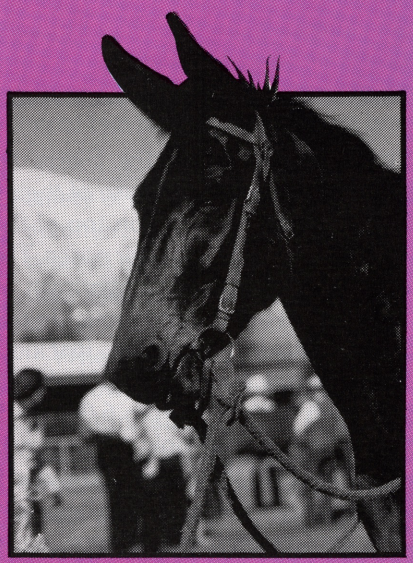

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BIG MOUNTAIN MOUSE OF THE HIGH SIERRA

THE MARMOT

Text and photos by
Mike McWherter

As we descended the western side of Baxter Pass, we could see a blue lake far below shimmering in the afternoon sun. The inlet to the lake looked like a shiny ribbon as it wound its way through a meadow of green grass. About 30 minutes later we reached the edge of the meadow. Between the meadow and steep walls of a nearby peak was the rubble of a talus slope. I said to my partner that this looked like marmot territory — lots of green grass for them to eat and rocks for them to hide in. We left our packs near the trail and started out with cameras for the talus.

Near the talus we heard a sharp whistle sound and saw three marmots fleeing from us. Hopping from boulder to boulder, they quickly moved over the rocks to higher ground and disappeared. Closer at hand we noticed a very fat marmot cautiously poking its head out of a rock cave. It was curious about our presence but still wary. Nearby, a much smaller marmot, likely born this year, ran to the top of a rock and stood up on its hind feet to get a better view of us.

Marmots which live in the Sierra Nevada are called Yellow-bellied marmots because of their distinctive yellow-brown underparts. The fur on top of their heads is black with a white band crossing their noses. The range of Yellow-bellied marmots is almost entirely in the northwest mountain ranges of the contiguous United States, including the Sierra Nevada, Cascades, Rockies, and the higher ranges of central Nevada and Utah. They are found at relatively high altitudes, from 6,000 to 12,000 feet. Their northern range extends only a little way into southwestern Canada. In the past their range extended farther south than it does today. Their remains have been found in excavations of Indian ruins in northern Arizona.

Marmots are the biggest members of the squirrel family *(Sciuridae)*, which also includes the Golden-mantled, Belding and California gray squirrels. The word marmot comes from the French *marmotte*, which means "mountain mouse." All marmots are of the genus *Marmota*. The yellow-bellied marmot is one of six species which inhabit North America. The scientific name, *Marmota flaviventris*, literally translates as "yellow bellied marmot."

Closely related to woodchucks (*Marmota monax)* of the wooded regions of the eastern United States, marmots have been called rock-chucks because of their preference for making their homes in the jumble of rocks at the base of mountains. Other related species are the hoary marmot (*Marmota caligata)*, Olympic marmot *(Marmota olympus)*, Vancouver marmot (*Marmota Vancouverensis)* and the Alaska marmot (*Marmota broweri).*

Waiting for the warmth of the morning sun before venturing out to begin their day of foraging, marmots generally feed in the early morning and late afternoon. Because they produce only one litter a year, efficient food gathering is vital for sustaining the species. Marmots consume large amounts of vegetation in order to store enough body fat to last them through a long winter's hibernation. Marmots live close to grassy meadows and are able to satisfy their food requirements with a minimum expenditure of energy. Energy not expended in searching for food is energy they can store as fat to help survive the winter.

In a study of marmots in the Mineral King area, Mark Jonasson of Loma Linda University found that they reach a peak in feeding activity in early July. By the end of July,

when the marmots have become fatter, the feeding frequency tapers off. Larger marmots, which by now have attained most of their needed fat reserves, will spend late afternoons lying on warm rocks watching younger marmots, who continue to take their feeding seriously. Depending upon age and season, marmots can weigh as much as 17 pounds. Although other scientists report that marmots consume insects, Jonasson found no such evidence in his study area at Mineral King.

Marmots of the Sierra Nevada begin their hibernation sometime in September or October. By then, they will have prepared their burrows with dry grasses for bedding. The entrance will be sealed off with dirt to keep out severe winter conditions. The marmot will then form a little ball, close its eyes, and begin a long hibernation. Its heart beat will slow down and its body temperature will drop. When marmots come out of hibernation in April, they will be lean and anxious to find food. But they also will be anxious to find a mate, as this is their breeding time.

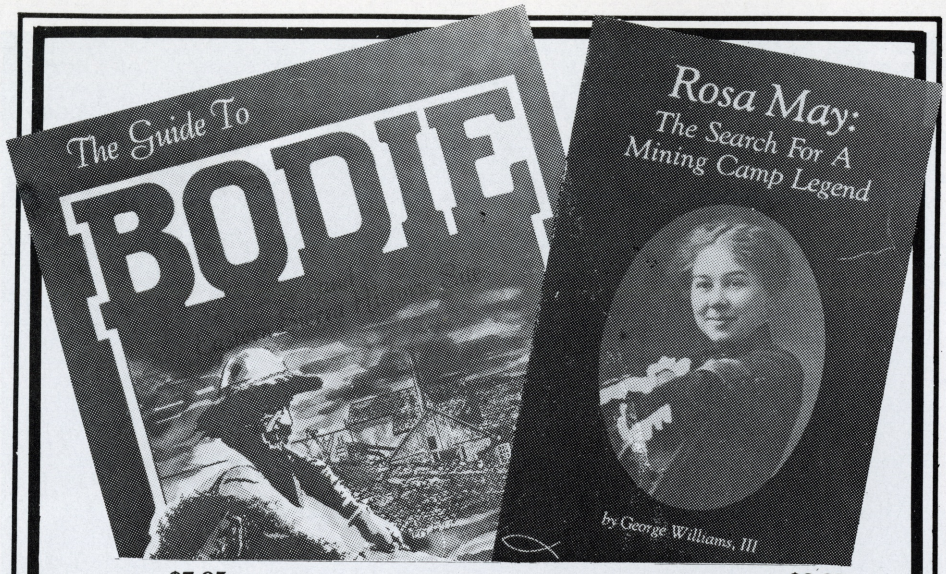
Yellow-bellied marmots are not as reproductive as other rodents. They have only one litter per year of four or five young. In order for marmots to continue as a species a large percentage of their young must survive. In Jonasson's study, he postulated that the reason for the apparently high number of marmots, despite the relatively low birth rate, is their efficiency in food source utilization and food gathering behavior. They expend a minimum of energy to get the food they need.

Marmots live in colonies which may cover many acres. Each colony may consist of more than 35 individuals. Within a colony, there seems to be a "pecking order" with one marmot dominating all others. The order is established by noisy bouts between individuals. Family territories exist to the extent that intruding marmots will be chased away.

Males often have a harem of two or more females. In this way, the more dominant male is able to mate with several females. The survival advantage of this kind of reproduction is that fertile females are able to mate with the dominant male, which will likely result in stronger offspring.

In May, about a month after mating, the female gives birth to four or five blind and furless young. The mother will nurse them and within a short time the little ones will open their eyes. Soon they will leave the den to begin feeding on vegetation. But the mother marmot will be close at hand to warn of danger. If she should sound her whistle the whole family will scurry back to the safety of the nearby talus. By the end of summer, the young will have put on a reserve of fat and most will have found their own burrows for the approaching winter.

When a chubby marmot is in an open meadow, it is vulnerable to swift predators such as the mountain lion, bobcat, coyote and fox. Another predator, the black bear, has powerful arms and is able to dig out marmots who have made their burrows in the



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ground. The eagle poses a threat mainly to the younger inexperienced marmots. In order to escape predators, marmots have way stations between their feeding grounds and burrows. Way stations are shared by all marmots within a colony. If a marmot detects a predator, it will make a whistle sound and thereby warn others to stop feeding and flee for way stations or their burrows. The whistle sound is only one of many sounds marmots are capable of rendering. Other sounds are: squeaks, grunts, squeals, gurgles, growls, screams, screeches, chirps and chatters.

Although marmots will run and hide when first approached, one need only have a little patience to observe them. In a little while, curiosity will get the best of one of them and it will poke its head out of its hiding place. Eventually others will climb to the tops of rocks where they can get a better view. If you spend a few hours with them, you may even be able to approach one very closely.

In the meadow below Baxter Pass, a large marmot had become accustomed to my presence and was going about its feeding almost unconcerned. I slowly moved closer. In about fifteen minutes I was within ten feet of him. He continued to be unconcerned. He nibbled away at the grass by moving forward slowly as his head moved rapidly from side to side. In the late afternoon, my partner saw me watching the marmot and came over to see if he could get a few photographs. I motioned to him that it was alright to proceed. The marmot seemed unconcerned about my partner's approach until another marmot whistled. At this sound he stopped his nibbling and lifted his head. Soon he lumbered off to the nearby talus and worked his way to the top of a large boulder where he could keep an eye on us. By now the sun was very low on the horizon and the marmot was facing it.

As the marmot watched the sun set, I wondered if he sensed from his own heaviness and the chill of the evening air that winter was near. The sun had almost disappeared below the horizon and only a few golden shafts were streaking across the darkened sky. The marmot turned away from the sun's last rays and disappeared into a world of granite and darkness. □

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Photo by Jim Stroup.

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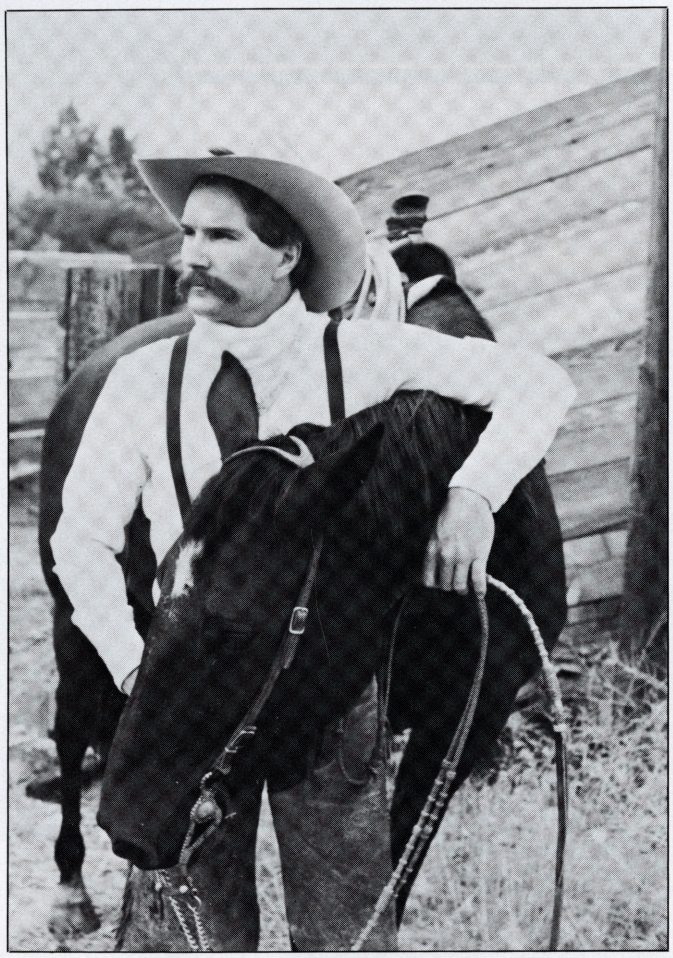
Gene Cooper

Cowboys in Bronze



Gene Cooper's bronzes are drawn from the everyday life of the modern cowboy. "Most of my ideas come from what I think cowboyin' is all about. There's not too many days you're gonna be ridin' a buckin' horse, or have a horse jerked plumb down by a steer . . . there's a lot of waitin' in cowboyin'."

by Marty Forstenzer

Western art dates back to the early 19th century, when artists began recording scenes from the newly-opened Western territories. Later, renowned practitioners like Charles Russell and Frederic Remington wanted to preserve the memory of a way of life which at the turn of the century was beginning to disappear. In modern times, Western artists have tried to continue that tradition of creating art which captures the flavor of the cowboy and the West.

One such artist is Gene Cooper of Coleville, California. The 32-year-old artist's work in drawings and bronze sculpture keeps with the tradition of Western Art, although he brings to it his own technique and point of view.

Gene has a relaxed, easygoing demeanor, and from his proximity to cowboys and ranches has picked up a Western drawl which belies his Southern California upbringing. Art was always his primary interest while growing up in the Torrance home he shared with five brothers and two sisters. He still has some drawings he made when he was six years old. Gene was a typical Southern California teenager, engaging in surfing and scuba diving, but at the same time nurturing his interest in art by attending exhibits at the Huntington Library and other Los Angeles art galleries. He attended Sonoma State College during the 1970s, earning a degree in art, but also becoming disillusioned because of conflicts between his art interests and the school's curriculum.

Temporarily losing interest in art, Gene decided to develop his secondary interest, horseback riding, and enrolled in a special horseshoeing school at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. There he was befriended by Lee Roeser of the Mammoth Lakes Pack Outfit, who was also attending the school. Roeser hired Gene to work as a packer for his outfit, and he continued to work there for several seasons, picking up work as a ranch hand during the winters.

Gene felt an immediate attraction to the High Sierra, and soon decided to settle in Coleville. He says, "I'd never been to the east side of the Sierra before, but once I got here you couldn't have *dragged* me away."

After a few years as a packer, Gene decided he wanted to "cowboy" throughout the year, so he signed on with a ranch in Coleville for a year and a half. In 1981, he went to the Snaffle Bit Futurity, a large horse show in Reno, little realizing the major impact the trip was to have on his future.

On the perimeter of the horse show, a number of Western artists were showing their work, and he saw some

"Home the Hard Way" Height 8 3/4", Length 8 1/2"

bronzes there by a sculptor named Mehl Lawson that he thought were about the best he'd ever seen.

"Since sculpture had been my main interest in college, I made a point of talking to Mehl. We visited quite a while, and he said if I ever had an opportunity to quit what I was doing and come down to his studio in San Diego, he'd get me started in art again."

Six months later, Gene went to San Diego and stayed two months. The Coleville artist describes that experience as a pivotal one, saying that he learned more there in two months than in all his years of art in high school and college.

One of the things that impressed him about Lawson's work was that he could see that the artist either had first-hand experience with riding and ranching, or had researched it thoroughly. "The work was right, everything looked the way it would in real life. A blanket was folded under the way it should be, or a saddle was hangin' the way it would really hang if a rider was leanin' a certain way. I think that's real important."

Lawson, who was recently admitted to the prestigious Cowboy Artists of America, had been completely self-taught, and recognizing the younger artist's keen interest and ability, was anxious to help him. He taught Gene a lot of the mechanics of sculpture which he'd been lacking, and maybe more importantly, instilled in him the desire and confidence to give up other pursuits and concentrate on art.

That commitment to art solidified after a while, and Gene decided to work as an artist full time.

Although an artist's lifestyle is certainly not suited to every temperament, Gene feels comfortable with it. "For me, it's the best thing I ever did, and the main reason is, it's what I *want to do.* I feel a lot freer, and my time is my own, although I end up spendin' most of my time in the studio."

He still likes to go out for day work on ranches occasionally, because in addition to enjoying the work, it's a good place for him to pick up new ideas for bronzes. When he begins to have the misgivings that most artists sometimes feel, Gene revisits the Lawson studio in San Diego, where his inspiration is renewed.

Another important person in Gene Cooper's life is his wife Kerry, whom he married in 1978. Gene gives her a lot of credit for enabling him to pursue art as a career, and describes her constant support as being of incalculable value.

Bronze sculpture is a difficult and expensive process. First, the artist must come up with an idea. Once Gene establishes his initial concept, he prefers to go right to clay with it rather than sketching it first. The original idea might change several times before he arrives at a finished product in clay. From that, he forms a latex rubber mold, either in one or several pieces, depending on the complexity of the sculpture. Then, a wax reproduction of the original mold is made. The wax figure is sent to a foundry, where the process is continued by encasing the figure in ceramic. Finally, a casting is made out of molten bronze, and the artist adds finishing touches and applies the patina, or color, under heat.

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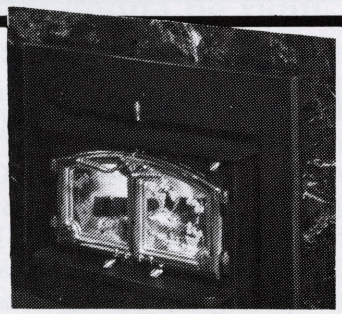
"Holdin' the Rodear" Height 15", Length 12"

"Center Fire" Height 4", Length 8 3/4"

Gene has some of his works on exhibit at the Trails West Art Gallery in Laguna Beach. He has also shown his work at the Snaffle Bit Futurity in Reno, and will have his bronzes at a show during Mule Days in Bishop.

Like every good artist, Gene has his own style and a particular point of view that makes his work distinctive. Many Western artists, and especially the early



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"Waitin' for Cavvy" **Height 6½", Length 9"**

ones, liked to depict scenes involving chases, stampedes, bucking horses, and the like. The subject of Gene Cooper's bronzes are drawn from the everyday life of the modern cowboy, what he calls the passive moments.

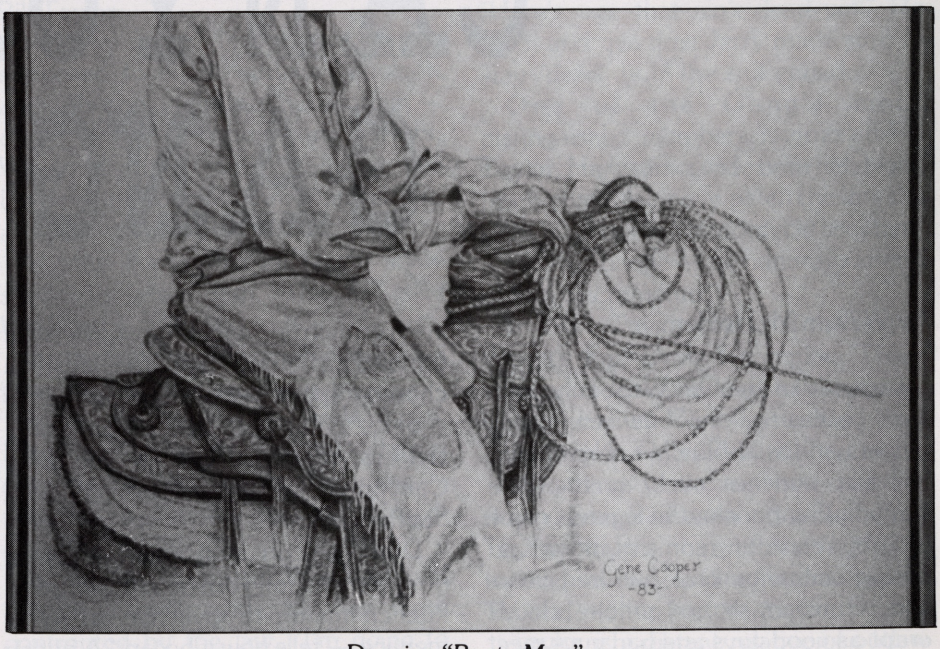
"Most of my ideas come from what I think cowboyin' is all about," he says. "There's not too many days you're gonna be ridin' a buckin' horse, or have a horse jerked plumb down by a steer, which happened to me once. In my art, I try to deal with the everyday stuff, because the quieter moments are 90% of a cowboy's life."

An example of this point of view is found in the bronze, "Holdin' the Rodear," which portrays a cowboy sitting in the saddle waiting, "because there's a lot of waitin' in cowboyin'."

Gene's main concern as an artist is to create art that will involve people. "If people like a piece of art," he says, "they're going to get involved with it. You can't look very long at a guy gettin' bucked off a horse, because it drains you." For the same reason, he works in a somewhat loose style instead of copying a subject exactly; he feels that this gives the viewer more of an opportunity to get involved in the piece.

After years in Coleville, Gene's attraction to the Eastern Sierra hasn't waned. "The thing I like most about the Eastern Sierra is, you can look one way and see the mountains stickin' straight up, and then you can look the other way and see for miles. But the main thing is, the people born and raised on this side are some of the finest people I've ever met. I'm real proud for them to call me friend."

Gene Cooper is lucky to be able to combine his two main interests and base a career on them. He feels a strong bond with the cowboys and packers of the Eastern Sierra, who are the subject of much of his work. Says Gene, "The thing that's important to me is, when I get older, if I overheard somebody sayin' about me, 'You know, that guy's a good artist, but he's a pretty good hand, too,' that's something that would make me real happy." □



Drawing *"Reata Man"*.

Photos by Ed Bode and William Holden

BLUE CANYON GANG

by William M. Holden

Legends of the Old West echo with gun battles galore between peace officers and wild bunches. Nowadays, half-wild bunches such as the Blue Canyon Gang make the legends come alive by reenacting some of those hair-raising scenarios of a hundred years ago. Guns crash and smoke clouds erupt as good guys and bad guys meet in a crunch — and take movie-style tumbles as they bite the dust in choreographed performances.

Since 1972, when half a dozen gun-slingers banded together, the Blue Canyon Gang has been lurking in Old Sacramento.

Don Woolcott as an outlaw — in wide brim hat and long duster, sucking on a kitchen match to give him an air of menace — tells how it began: "A bunch of us were Clampers, members of E Clampus Vitus. Many of them were rowdies who seemed more interested in drinking and shooting out streetlights. But some of us had a serious interest in the Old West, and in learning about weapons, and in doing skits to show people what life was like in the old days."

Besides Woolcott, this group included Robert Hayes, Ron Johnson

and Nevada Jack, a.k.a. Eldridge Frodge.

They had a friend named Joe who operated a bar in Blue Canyon, in the Sierra. Joe owned a falling-down cabin and said they could have the wood. They used it to build false-front buildings for skits at Cal Expo. So it seemed fitting to name themselves after Blue Canyon.

For some reason, Cal Expo Director Kirk Breed took a dislike to the false-front town and said he would have it dismantled so it could be stored between shows. But the town mysteriously ended up demolished, instead of dismantled. The miffed Gang members relocated their local performances to Old Sacramento.

In show biz tradition, they don't let bad weather daunt them. They've done skits in the snow, with snow falling, in Tonopah, Nevada, and Colfax, and in torrential rains in Old Sacramento.

The Gang's roster now numbers about 25. Real-life occupations run a wide gamut. But their common bond is a passion for the Old West. They relish slipping into costumes of bygone days to impersonate sheriffs, outlaws, fancy dudes, saloon girls, ex-soldiers and other frontier characters.

Seven members are women, wives of members, and perform with as much ginger as the men. Juanita Griffith, as an Indian maiden in buckskin, blasts away with a shotgun. Jean Melendez glitters as a barmaid in purple satin gown, fishnet nylons and a pink feather in her hair.

Jerry Rushing straps on a Colt .45 and dons a black sombrero and black frock coat, and he's a gambler or outlaw. Sometimes he adds a silver star, and he's a marshal or deputy. He contributes the expertise he gained years ago in gunfights in Calico Ghost Town, near Barstow.

"I like to think we give people some idea of what the Old West was really like," he says. "The only way to do that is reenact it. If we can't reenact it better than you see on television, we might as well hang up our guns."

Costumes are "definitely not out of Hollywood," says Jerry Rushing. "We don't wear fancy belt buckles. We try to keep everything authentic. We make a lot of our clothes — by looking through old library books."

Some women members enjoy sewing fancy dresses and gussying themselves up in styles of a century ago.

"Or we find the actual clothes themselves, sometimes, in an antique store," Rushing says. "Some of mine are original turn-of-the-century hand-stitched clothes I bought in an antique store in Old Sacramento. Or, if you're lucky, you can find something in a thrift store, at a reasonable cost."

Members learn to improvise, as the need arises. "If someone blows a line, someone near him will usually think of something to say that's even funnier. We have lots of talented people," says Bill Taylor.

In one finale, Nevada Jack was supposed to shoot outlaws Woolcott and Johnson. He raised his shotgun — *click, click*. Anticipating shots, Woolcott flung himself against the building and Johnson threw himself into a horse trough. Oops.

"Looks like you forgot to put some shells in your gun, sheriff," said Woolcott.

At that, Nevada Jack whipped out a pistol and dispatched the pair.

Mike Samaritano — in Civil War cap, blue pants with yellow stripe, suspenders, sleeve garters, bandana — portrays a Yankee deserter-turned-outlaw.

In one skit, he and Woolcott had robbed a bank and just then were confronted by the law. "I'm going to blow you away, sheriff," Woolcott said, leveling his dragoon-style Colt .44.

At that, the barrel fell off the pistol. "That's what I get for buying a bargain-basement gun," Woolcott said sadly.

Jerry Rushing remembers lying in a Calico street, pretending to be dead. With eyes closed, he couldn't see what was happening. Had the skit ended? He opened his eyes and lifted his head.

"The heavies were walking over to me to see if I was dead. I was hoping one of them still had another blank left, so he could shoot me and cover my boo-boo," Jerry says.

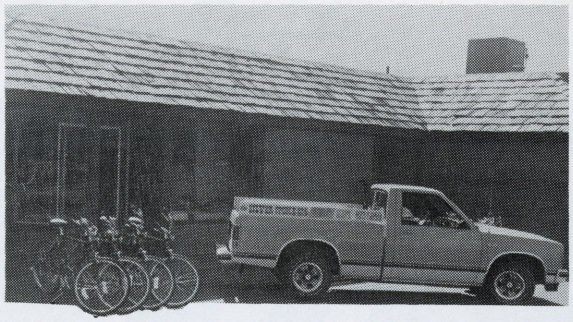
Luckily one gunslinger shouted, "Here's one that ain't dead yet!" He fired, and this time Jerry made sure to stay "dead" until the skit ended.

One of the Gang's most distinguished members is grizzled Bill Taylor. He wears a wide brim hat, black frock coat, black eye patch (he lost the sight of an eye in a motorcycle accident) and silver badge — as honorary sheriff of Old Sacramento.

In 1963, Taylor captured the title of World's Fast-Draw Champion. Three years earlier, when he won the national meet, he met Clint Eastwood, then appearing in TV's "Rawhide" series.

"Anything you can show me I'm doing wrong?" Eastwood asked. And Taylor taught him some lightning techniques to help him get the drop on TV and motion picture foes.

Taylor is a distant relative of outlaw



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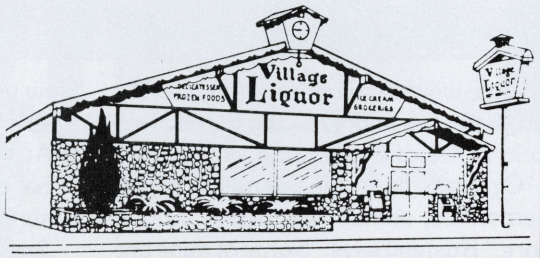

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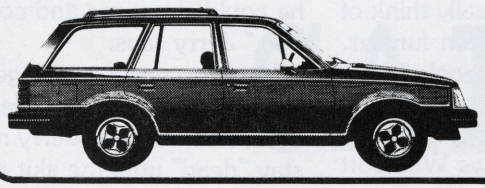

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John Wesley Hardin, but doesn't know whether to brag or complain about it. His great grandfather, a Texas Ranger, was a cousin of Hardin. But the two never tangled with each other, unlike many a fictional story of relatives fighting on opposite sides of the law.

Robert Hayes cuts a comic figure as a grubby-looking country doctor in top hat, stiff collar, pinstripe pants and black frock coat. "Doc" Hayes prescribes big doses of humor. "We try to put enough comedy in what we do so it doesn't seem so violent," he says. "It kind of rounds everything out."

Blaise Vanderlinden is a laugh-getter as the town drunk, 'Mudslide MacBride', so named because he was "orphaned by a mudslide," supposedly.

He wears trousers over his red "long handles," and a floppy hat. "I saunter up to the bandits in the middle of a robbery, and usually I'm the first one shot because I stumbled into it. I'm the clown, a kid pleaser. I like to see the kids laugh."

Vanderlinden explains his fondness for doing the shows. "You're able to forget who you are, and let loose and act silly. Mudslide MacBride lets me do that."

In one skit, several performers were idling on a curb as Nevada Jack moseyed past with his mule 'Raindrop,' burdened with an enormous load of pots and pans. Somebody must have buckled the cinch strap too tightly, because Raindrop suddenly went into a violent kicking spasm, sending pots and pans flying in every direction, to the crowd's delight.

Once a performer not included in the cast of characters felt compelled to get into the act — and stole the show. It happened as Jerry Rushing's then-wife Sharon was sitting in the audience in Calico with their big brown puppy 'Coco' on a leash.

When Coco heard shots and saw his master fall, he got so excited he jerked the leash from Sharon's hands and dashed off.

"I was supposed to be dead," Jerry says, "but Coco was whining and licking me so much I couldn't keep a straight face."

Ken Fontaine remembers the time he, as sheriff, burst out of an outhouse when he heard a shot from the nearby saloon. A woman ran from the saloon.

"What happened?" Fontaine asked.

"I saw the whole thing, sheriff. He shot him in the back — it was self defense."

That tickled the crowd, and the rest of the dialogue was ad lib, because the king-size Fontaine was quaking with laughter and blew his lines. "Get back in the saloon where you belong!" he ordered.

"You wanna come along with me?"

"Sure."

"Well, you'll have to take a bath first."

Fontaine cracked up and couldn't utter another line, even if he could have remembered one.

Fontaine reflects on what he derives from the shows. "In costume, you become someone completely different. You kind of escape into a character. It's a way to escape the ordinary doldrums of life."

Like Bill Taylor, Lee Boblet also has a distinguished lawman ancestor. His great-grandfather was Robert A. Anderson, first sheriff of Butte County.

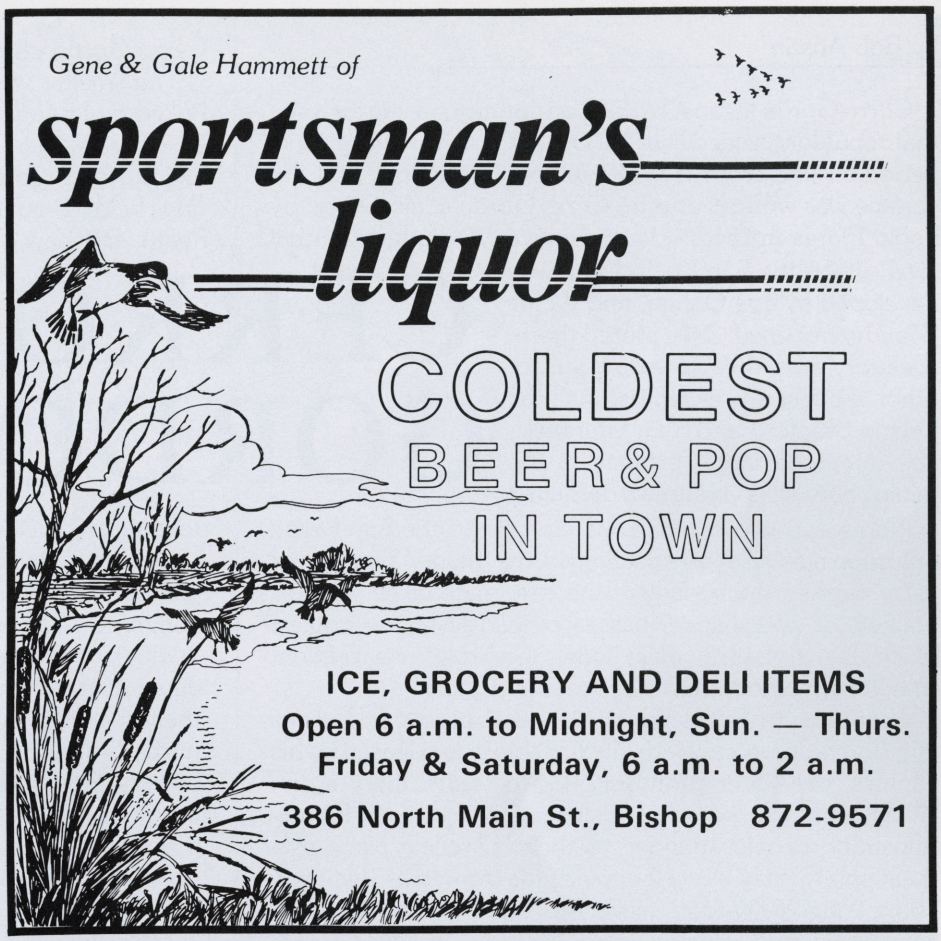
Boblet recalls a shoot-out at Old Sacramento's Eagle Theatre, where Chris Melendez flipped over the stairway rail in a trick fall, and split his britches in an embarrassing place. When the performance ended, someone loaned him a raincoat until his wife Jean could fetch another pair.

Boblet — who wears boots with spurs, leather pants with brass rivets, sleeve garters and a plainsman-type hat — also likes to do falls. He flings himself backward, combining this with a roll that makes a dramatic bit.

But sometimes a fall doesn't go exactly right, and the performer may end up with aches and pains. To remedy that sort of ailment, the Gang has a chiropractor handy in the person of Mark Casha, D.C., who as a Gang member dons a slouch hat and denims and packs a cannon-like .70 caliber muzzle-loading shotgun.

Casha explains his interest in the wild-and-wooly, "it gives a taste of the Old West. . . and it's fun."

The Gang has a secret. They've done benefit shoot-outs for the March of Dimes, United Way, Cancer Society, and the Easter Seal telethon. But they never brag about being do-gooders. They wouldn't want to ruin their villainous reputation. □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CERRO GORDO

by Bob Austin

Cerro Gordo means "big hill," an appropriate tag for a site that reputedly yielded over $17,000,000 in silver over a short period of time, from 1872-79. Although it is likely that the surface was worked prior to Cerro Gordo's "discovery" by Pablo Flores in 1865, it was not given due attention until 1866, when the San Lucas Mine was developed by Joe Ochoa, and Victor Beaudry opened his store there. (Beaudry was thus to follow suit of other modest storekeepers, such as Leland Stanford and S.D. Ghiradelli, who amassed large fortunes in the mining bonanzas via shrewd dealings.)

Flores and two companions discovered the San Felipe outcropping while prospecting in the Inyos. The Flores party worked the surface of the carbonate heart-rock for pockets of pod-shaped masses of lead-silver ore bodies. Since there was no main lode, they dug in a random trenching method known as "coyote digging."

According to Flores, his party was captured by Indians and his two partners were killed. Pablo was released by his captors, only after promising not to return there again. While it is not known what religious significance the Paiute-Shoshone people attached to their "Dwelling place of a great spirit," they did gather pine nuts from trees that grew above the 6000-foot elevation and carved utensils, ornaments and effigies from the talc deposits found throughout the area.

Pablo kept his promise for two years, but returned to Cerro Gordo with a large party of hungry miners who had seen his ore samples in Virginia City. Eventually all trees within 100 square miles of Cerro Gordo would be stripped to feed the smelting furnaces. The Mexican miners built small adobe *hornito* ovens and larger *vasos* to heat the gangue from the ore. Crude loaves of lead-silver were formed as the gangue cooled. Though primitive, the ore taken from the early Cerro Gordo operations was of such high quality that the Mexican ovens were profitable.

Meanwhile, Victor Beaudy was acquiring mining properties through judgments executed to compensate for his liberal lines of credit extended to such patrons as Jose Ochoa (San Lucas Mine), Jesus Almada (partner with Ochoa in the Union Mine), and Jesus Lozano (a store owner who had interests in several claims). He encouraged a friend from San Francisco, Mortimer Belshaw, to venture his capital and expertise in Cerro Gordo. Belshaw and another partner, Abner B. Elder, had extensive experience in the silver mines of Mexico. Belshaw and Elder had financial connections in San Francisco, where Cerro Gordo's bullion would eventually be shipped, following its freighting by mule team through Los Angeles to the Port of San Pedro.

After obtaining the needed financial support, Belshaw would oversee the building of a smelter, construct a toll road (Yellow Grade), and pipe in water from nearby springs. It was this infusion of capital improvements that would cause Los Angeles, then a town of 10,000, to regard Cerro Gordo as its "Comstock."

The smelter was built at a site convenient to Belshaw's holdings of galena ore deposits. Galena was essential to the smelting of silver; hence the name "galamadores", or "galamidors" given to slag furnaces. Located in a saddle of the ridge below Buena Vista Peak (now known as Cerro Cordo Peak), Belshaw's first smelter was a slag reverberatory furnace which made more efficient use of time and fuel than did the Mexican ovens. A state minerologist, Goodyear, who visited Cerro Gordo as early as 1872, reported that a galamidor required 1.75 cords of wood and 30 bushels of charcoal over a period of 24 hours to process 10 to 12 tons of ore, yielding 90 to 100 bars, valued at $19 each.

Belshaw would later add a blast furnace, which had a greater yield capacity than that of the hill's other galamidors combined. Still another smelting improvement was the addition of a water jacket surrounding the furnace to insure equal distribution of heat. The production of charcoal for the furnaces, however, remained primitive. Local wood was burned in crude earthen trenches, an inefficient process known to be at least 2,000 years old. The stone or adobe beehive kilns known to other Great Basin areas — such as the Wildrose kilns, the Ward kilns or Colonel Steven's kilns — were not in use upon the mountain.

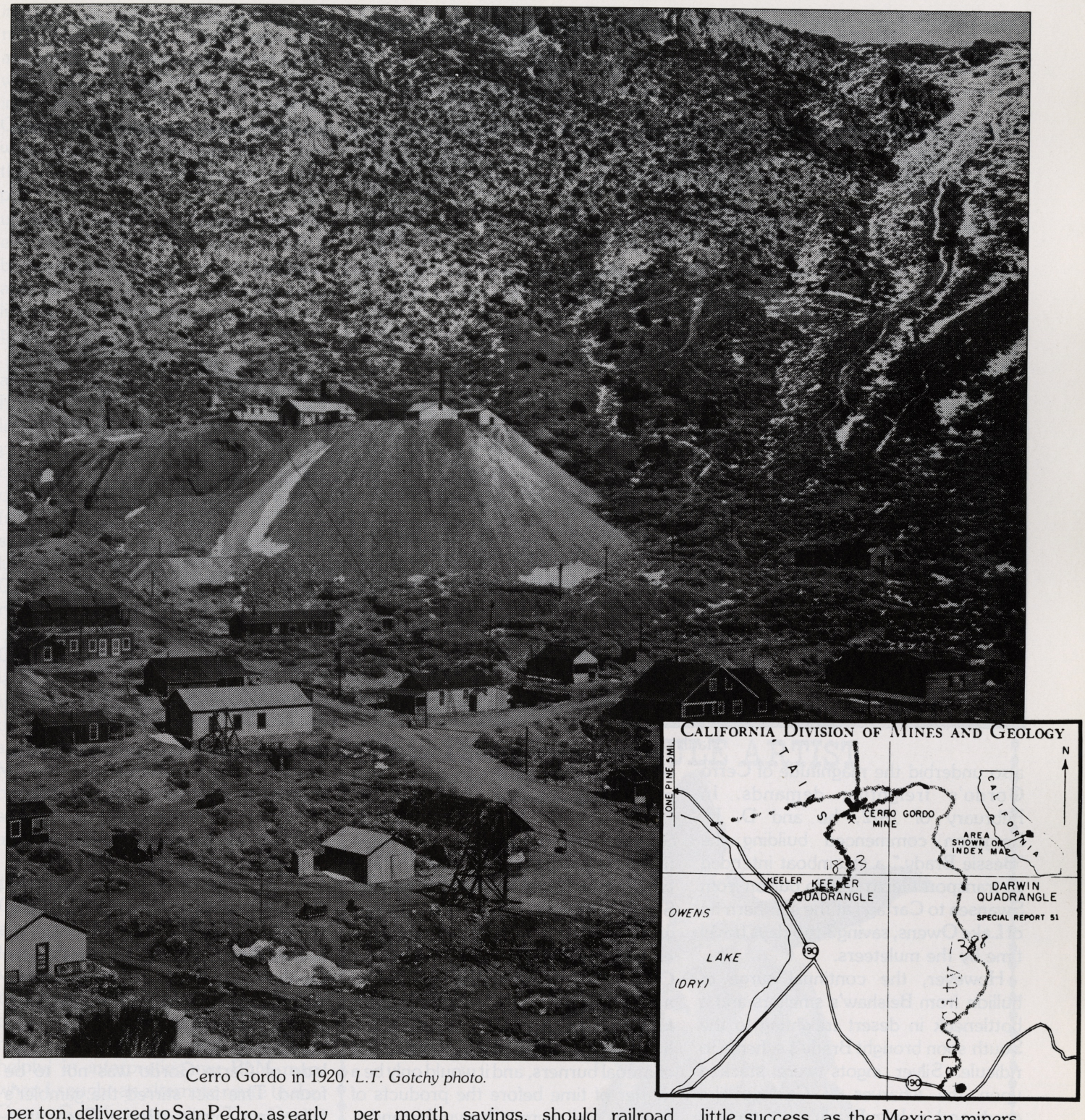
The road to Cerro Gordo from Keeler was hewn from basaltic rock and sulfite formations by Chinese work gangs. This wagon road opened the way for the transport of heavy equipment needed for hardrock mining and for shipments of lead-silver loaves coming down the grade in locked-hub wagons. Remi Nadeau, the famous Los Angeles teamster, who five years earlier had started in the freighting business with a loan from Victor Beaudry's brother, was awarded a three-year contract to deliver Cerro Gordo's rough bullion to Los Angeles. By the end of the first year, over 340 tons of bullion had been transported.

With each return trip came staples from Los Angeles to supply the mines. A given team would make eight round trips per year, each team paying its levy at Belshaw's toll gate, located atop the Yellow Grade Road.

Prior to the tapping of Cerro Gordo Springs, water came to Cerro Gordo by pack train. Belshaw's pipeline, which worked by gravity flow, brought the site some 1,300 gallons per day; about 1.8 gallons per claim. This reduced the cost of water from the previous 10 cents per gallon to about 3.5 cents, depending upon flow. The pipes were, however, exposed to the elements and delivery was often uncertain. Intermittently, residents of Cerro Gordo had to revert to water by pack train, with delivery at the higher-elevation Belmont Mine costing a minimum of 12.5 cents per gallon.

Stephen Boushey established the Cerro Gordo Water Company in 1874, bringing water to Cerro Gordo from Miller Springs. The ten-mile pipeline was buried properly to protect it from the elements, and worked by the lifting of three Gardner-Denver pumps in series with gravity flow.

Although it is reported that the net profit of the ore processed through Belshaw's smelters ran as high as $150



per ton, delivered to San Pedro, as early as 1870 it was argued that transportation costs were extracting an undue toll. The **Inyo Independent** argued that the costs of wagon freighting were prohibitive (August 8, 1880). The paper estimated that transportation costs for Cerro Gordo bullion, traveling to San Pedro by Nadeau's teamsters and by ship to San Francisco, exceeded $36,000 per month. The paper projected a $10,000 per month savings, should railroad transportation be substituted at Visalia.

However, since the high quality ore was still yielding a healthy net profit per ton, despite freight costs, Belshaw and Beaudry were to continue to ignore certain long economies associated with hardrock mining. Instead, they employed their energies in trying to force out the remaining local competition. This task was to meet with little success, as the Mexican miners, working as it were under a different economy, never abandoned the area.

The rails did come to Cerro Gordo. The Carson and Colorado established a terminus at Keeler, but not until 1878 when the high grade ores had been worked out. Soda from Owens Lake became the major object of transport. Keeler remained the Southern terminus of the Carson and Colorado, which was sold to Southern Pacific in

1900. The SPRR realized its investment with the turn-of-the-century booms in Candelaria, Mina and Tonopah. The line was closed in 1959 due to "declining and unpredictable use. . ."

Other innovations in transportation were developed to support the transport of Cerro Gordo bullion. When Remi Nadeau's contract reached its term in December 1871, it was awarded to James Brady, supervisor of the smelting operations at Swansea. Brady had underbid Nadeau, but had also underbid the magnitude of Cerro Gordo's freighting demands. In February of 1872, he and D. H. Ferguson commenced building the "Bessie Brady," a steamboat intended to transport Cerro Gordo bullion from Swansea to Cartago at the southern tip of Lake Owens, saving 3 to 5 days travel time by the muleteers.

However, the continual surge of bullion from Belshaw's smelters and a bottleneck in desert freighting to the South soon brought Brady's scheme to ridicule. Silver ingots were stacked upon the wharves of Cartago like cordwood in July. Brady's efficiency in utilizing the lake for a savings dramatized his failure to make adequate arrangements at the other end. The contract was forfeited and Belshaw signed another with a teamster from Bakersfield, J. Chester.

Chester, too, was unable to complete the contract, as heavy rains washed out the road through the Tehachapis to Bakersfield, and Chester's horses fell victim to a plague. By May of 1873, it is reported that as many as 30,000 ingot loaves were stacked at Cartago, waiting for freighters. Belshaw and Brady met Nadeau on one of his return runs from the Nevada mines and prevailed upon him to resume shipping Cerro Gordo's bullion. Nadeau agreed, provided that Belshaw and Brady would invest capital in the new Cerro Gordo Freighting Company, assuring that adequate way stations would be established between Cerro Gordo and Los Angeles. By June of 1873, the familiar drag chains of Nadeau's mule teams were heard once more.

The Bessie Brady, docked at Swansea and out of operation within five months of its maiden voyage, would later be purchased by Colonel Sherman Stevens. Stevens was an entrepreneur with a background in military engineering. Securing a loan from the Owens Lake Company, he established a sawmill in the Sierra Nevada to supply fuel to Cerro Gordo. The forests of the Inyo range were being stripped by charcoal burners, and it would only be a matter of time before the products of Stevens' mill were in heavy demand.

A trail was cut up Cottonwood Canyon, about 6,000 feet from the base. A flume was constructed to haul the milled lumber 13 miles down the flow of Cottonwood Creek to the base. By November of 1873, the flumes were completed, and milled lumber was deposited near the confluence of Cottonwood Creek and Owens Lake. The timing of Stevens' fuel supply for Cerro Gordo was pivotal, as the Inyos had become virtually exhausted.

Stevens would eventually build the adobe charcoal kilns, which still stand east of Highway 395 north of Cartago. The kilns, twenty feet wide and twenty feet high, were constructed of adobe brick, laid in beehive fashion. Air vents near the base controlled the flow.

During the same time (1876-77), Stevens brought the "Mollie Stevens" to Lake Owens, using Keeler as his eastshore terminus. Somewhat smaller than the "Bessie Brady," the "Mollie Stevens" is said to have resembled a tugboat, as opposed to a lake steamer.

If these later two improvements were intended for the exclusive purpose of rendering services to Cerro Gordo, they must be viewed as foolhardy; Cerro Gordo's mills began to decline in production in 1876, a fact that was no secret. And although Nadeau's Cerro Gordo Freighting Company was not without its problems, the maiden voyage of the "Mollie Stevens" would be no salvo to Remi's mules. The mother lode of Cerro Gordo was not to be found. This fact stirred the gambler's fallacy in many speculators. There were the prospects of Darwin or Coso hitting it big. There were Mina and Mammoth to the north. But whatever Stevens' reasons, his latter ventures failed.

Lode litigation, which was to plague other mining operations of this era, came to Cerro Gordo. A lengthy battle ensued between the San Felipe and the Union Mine interests concerning the extension of the galena deposits between the two claims. Big money was

Hauling cable going to Cerro Gordo. *John Jones photo.*

involved in lode litigation; namely, money for consulting engineers and attorneys. After an appellate motion was filed on behalf of the Union Mine interests (who had lost at the Superior Court level), an out-of-court settlement was negotiated in 1875. As important as this litigation may have been to the parties, it did not have a major impact upon Cerro Gordo's decline, and the extent of the litigation in the area must be viewed as minor when weighed against the other extensive lode litigation which seemed to be seizing the country at this time.

In 1876, Belshaw cooled his furnaces at Cerro Gordo. The high grade ore had apparently run out, and the ores of lesser value could not sustain the prohibitive freight costs. In 1877, a fire destroyed what remained of Belshaw's operations. In 1888, all the major furnaces were shut down. The last shipment of Cerro Gordo's lead-silver loaves came down the Yellow Grade in October, 1879. Locked hubs were not needed, as the load was relatively light.

Several attempts to revive Cerro Gordo, a town which once had a population of 3,500, followed. An example of the town's shrinkage following the demise of its glory days is perhaps best summarized by California State Minerologist W. A. Goodyear's findings of 1888: in July of that year he found some 40 souls ekeing out a living in the area as best they could.

It is recommended that if you are planning to visit the ghost town of Cerro Gordo, which looms in the Inyos above the Owens Valley at some 8,500 feet, check in with the Interagency Visitor Center just south of Lone Pine to determine weather and road conditions. Mrs. Graham, an Information Officer with the Center, was helpful in interpreting my BLM map when I sought an alternate route to the Cerro Gordo town site. The Cerro Gordo Road ("Old Yellow Grade") could not be negotiated as snow was banked heavily in a shady marbled canyon about four miles up from Keeler.

When open, the Yellow Grade Road from Keeler, once proud terminus of the Carson & Colorado narrow gauge, is the preferable route, although four-wheel drive is highly recommended. You should carry an ample water

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Stockpile of bullion at Cerro Gordo.

supply, since the steep, 8-mile road may agitate your radiator. But don't dismay, it's an easier trip by motor vehicle than by freight wagon, once pulled up the grade by Remi Nadeau's 18-mule teams.

You should devote a full day's trip to Cerro Gordo, especially if the Cerro Gordo Road out of Keeler is closed. My alternate route took me up Highway 190 near the Darwin turnoff to a road marked 'Talc City.' Several talc mines are visible from the road. The Talc City Mine was for many years the nation's principal source of steatite grade talc (Insulator Manufacturing). Together with the Western Mine in south Inyo County and the Silver Dollar Mine in San Bernardino, these mines were the principal source of talc in California between 1916 and 1931.

Take the road numbered 1388 on the BLM maps north, past the Viking Mine. 1388 is known as the Santa Rosa Road or the San Lucas Road. This is catch-as-catch-can, but the road itself shows more evidence of travel than its forks. Some 12 miles in, you'll enter San Lucas Canyon, named for Ochoa's mine, the first opened in Cerro Gordo. About three miles later, you'll encounter Cerro Gordo Road (numbered 1803). Turn left. Four miles later, you'll be in Cerro Gordo, amidst its tailing heaps, old tunnels, a headframe or two, and signs of switchback trails where mule trains brought water or wood. Look for the trail to the Belmont Mine at the south end of town. The old American Hotel still stands, as do stone chimneys of galamidors and foundations of several other buildings. A stone corral remains near the toolgate site off the Old Yellow Grade.

Or, you can look for the main lode. No one has ever found it. □

Bringing wood to Cerro Gordo.

Bluegrass Festival '84 is located at Millpond Recreation Area, just a few miles north of Bishop, CA. The breathtaking crest of the High Sierra forms the backdrop for the stage at one of the most picturesque sites found anywhere in the world! Beautiful high country lakes and backpacking trails abound. And, be sure to bring your fishing gear. Catch your limit of trout early in the morning and then B.B.Q. them for lunch before the Festival begins at 2:00 P.M. Saturday.

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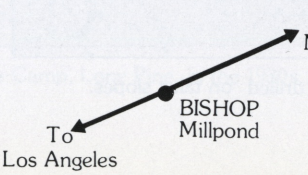


Bishop is located 267 miles north of L.A. and 203 miles south of Reno on the eastern side of the High Sierra.

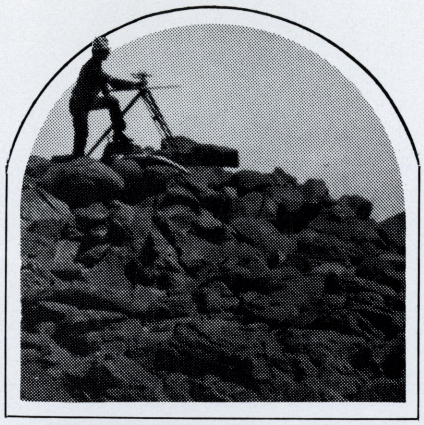
On Highway 395

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MT. WHITNEY TRAIL

by Mary A. Locker

"Sleet and icy rain beat down upon them, while avalanches would repeatedly obliterate their new made trail. The sliding talus was treacherous, and when the men would blast a bowlder out of their path they would see, to their dismay, tons of rough angular rocks roll down into their path."

Harold French
San Francisco Chronicle



Photos courtesy of the Inyo National Forest Service Archives

Such was life in 1903-04 for the men who built the Mount Whitney Trail. Actually, the first known construction of a trail to Mount Whitney began in 1881 for a scientific expedition led by Professor Samuel P. Langley, then Director of the Allegheny Observatory. The expedition made observations of the quantity and quality of heat from the sun.

The trail started from what is now Lone Pine Campground (then Santa Fe Jake's Place), and ended at the base of Mount Whitney near Trail Camp. It is unknown who built the Langley expedition trail, but a guess would be that it was a joint effort of some Lone Pine residents and members of the Allegheny Observatory.

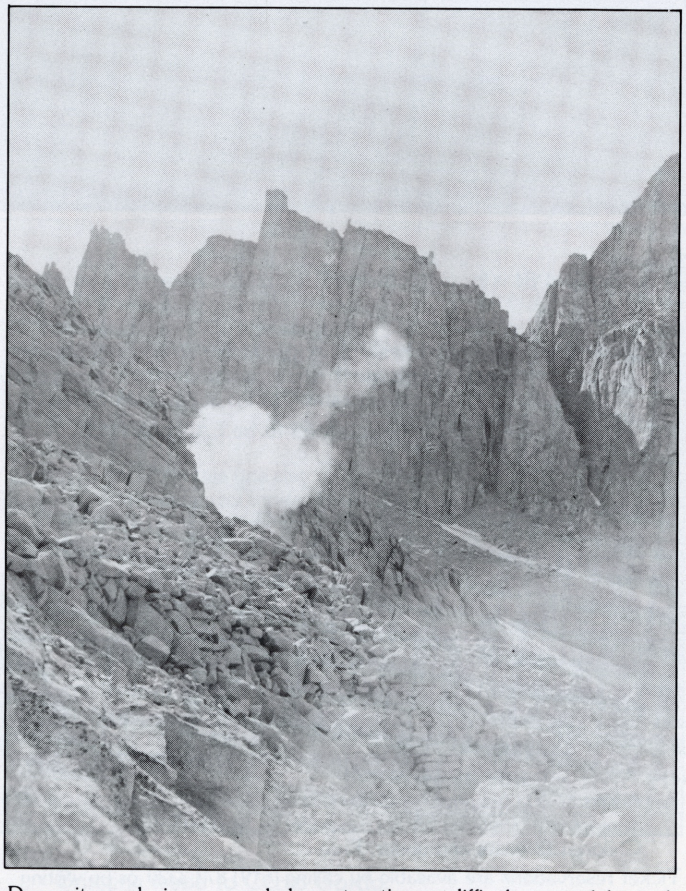
In 1903 a Mr. Spears, with $700 and 14 men, began building the trail again from Lone Pine Creek to "Lake of the Lonesome Pine." The crew built the trail to within three and a half miles of the summit, but had to stop because their funds ran out.

The County Supervisors appropriated $200 more to complete the trail to the top of Mount Whitney. An owner of a delivery service and stage coach line in Lone Pine, Gustave Marsh, took up the construction from Trail Camp, then known as Mexican Camp. Marsh started out with 15 men, seven of whom deserted within the first few days.

One can hardly blame them. Altitude sickness, isolation and the very intensive hard labor could be withstood by only the hardiest men. With picks, shovels, hand drills and dynamite, they inched their way toward the crest. The steep talus slope above Consultation Lake showed no mercy. Dirt had to be laid over ice so pack mules and horses could carry supplies. Despite severe headaches and nausea, the men held and turned hand drills while others beat on the drills with sledge hammers, to make holes for the dynamite.

Then came the clearing of rocks and boulders with picks and shovels after each blast. Before the men could rest after the hard day's labor, they had to

Holes for dynamite were carefully drilled on talus slopes.



Dynamite explosions preceded construction on difficult parts of the trail.

The Civilian Conservation Corps Camp, Lone Pine, in the 1930s.

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Packing in the compressor on mules — 1947

fix their own meals on campfires and crude stoves. There was very little wood at Mexican Camp, so their fuel wood had to be brought up from below. Horace Elder, a packer in Lone Pine, kept the men well-supplied with wood, tools and food.

On July 8, 1904, Marsh's crew started construction once again. Their base camp was Mexican Camp, at 12,000 feet. New difficulties were encountered as the men had to shovel trenches through the snow to allow the pack animals to pass. One trench was 300 yards long.

To encourage their beasts of burden, the men sometimes carried the packs themselves.

At the beginning of August, the men came across a chasm, just a few hundred yards from the summit. It would be impossible to build the trail across it. Everyone thought that was the end of the line. . . everyone except Gustave Marsh. He had his crew use drills and dynamite to change the angle of the cliff and fill the chasm with debris.

The night of August 7, 1904, the crew set off pine pitch, rockets and dynamite on top of Mount Whitney, and the residents of Lone Pine knew the trail was completed.

Marsh went back to his stage coach and delivery service, and the trail crew went back to the mines.

But this was just the beginning.

On October 30, 1903, the weather forced Marsh's crew to end trail construction for the year. That winter, money was raised to finance the next summer's expected completion. The women of Lone Pine raised $69 with a basket social and dance. The town of Independence threw in $85, and Keeler contributed $67 for the $300 needed to finish the trail.

In 1908, Dr. William Campbell of the University of California Lick Observatory, Dr. Charles Abbot of the Smithsonian Institute, and Gus Marsh made a trip to the top of Mount Whitney and decided it would be an excellent site for an observatory. The Smithsonian's Hodgkin Fund would provide the money. However, the trail was in need of repairs and improvements before supplies could be packed to the summit.

Again, the residents of Lone Pine raised money for the trail. With a population of only 350, they held a dance which netted $130, lemonade sales brought in $13.90, and the towns of Independence and Keeler once again pitched in.

On July 18, 1909, Gus Marsh and his crew started the trail improvements. But money ran out shortly, and some of the men returned to Lone Pine to find other employment.

Construction on the observatory began at once. Materials used were reinforced steel, concrete, sheet metal and native rock. At one time, the weather forced Marsh's crew to abandon construction work. When the storm settled below the summit, Marsh continued construction alone; a few days later, the crew returned. The observatory was finished on August 28,

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1909, and Dr. Abbot arrived to take his first observations.

The observatory was 30 feet long, 12 feet wide and 10 feet high. It had two rooms: one for scientific equipment and another left open to anyone needing shelter. Experiments and observations conducted on Mount Whitney at the time included determining atmospheric moisture on other planets, upper atmosphere characteristics, and atmospheric radiation. The observatory was in operation from 1909 to 1913, then became primarily a shelter for hikers.

Due to problems with avalanches and the late snow melt, the U.S. Forest Service, in the late 1930s, decided to relocate the last switchbacks above old Mexican Camp farther south, closer to Consultation Lake. At the same time, the National Park Service took up trail reconstruction on the west side of Mount Whitney.

In 1937, a Forest Service crew headed by Hank Coulter did needed reconstruction from Whitney Portal (then called Hunter's Camp) to Trail Camp (then known as Mexican Camp). Another Forest Service crew did reconstruction from Whitney Portal down to Santa Fe Jake's Place, the current site of Lone Pine Campground.

It was difficult and dangerous work. The mules walked gingerly over rough ground with their loads of blasting caps and dynamite — carried on separate mules, of course!

The mules were indispensable. As Henry Olivas' train approached the west side of Mount Whitney, an unexpected blast pounded their ears, and rocks and pebbles rained down upon them. Thanks to the steady nerves of Henry's mules and good packing techniques, none of the dynamite or blasting caps went off. Man and mules were unharmed. Needless to say, the blasters got an earful from Henry Olivas.

Pack mules and horses were the only way to get supplies to the crews. The Forest Service hired every available packer, and strings of twelve mules and horses trudging up to the base camp were a common sight. The best mules for the job were squat and barrel-shaped. Long-legged mules were prone to leg problems.

A typical pack trip would start at

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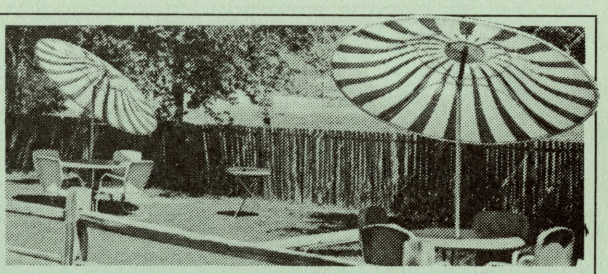

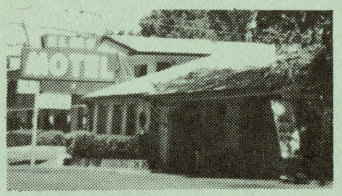

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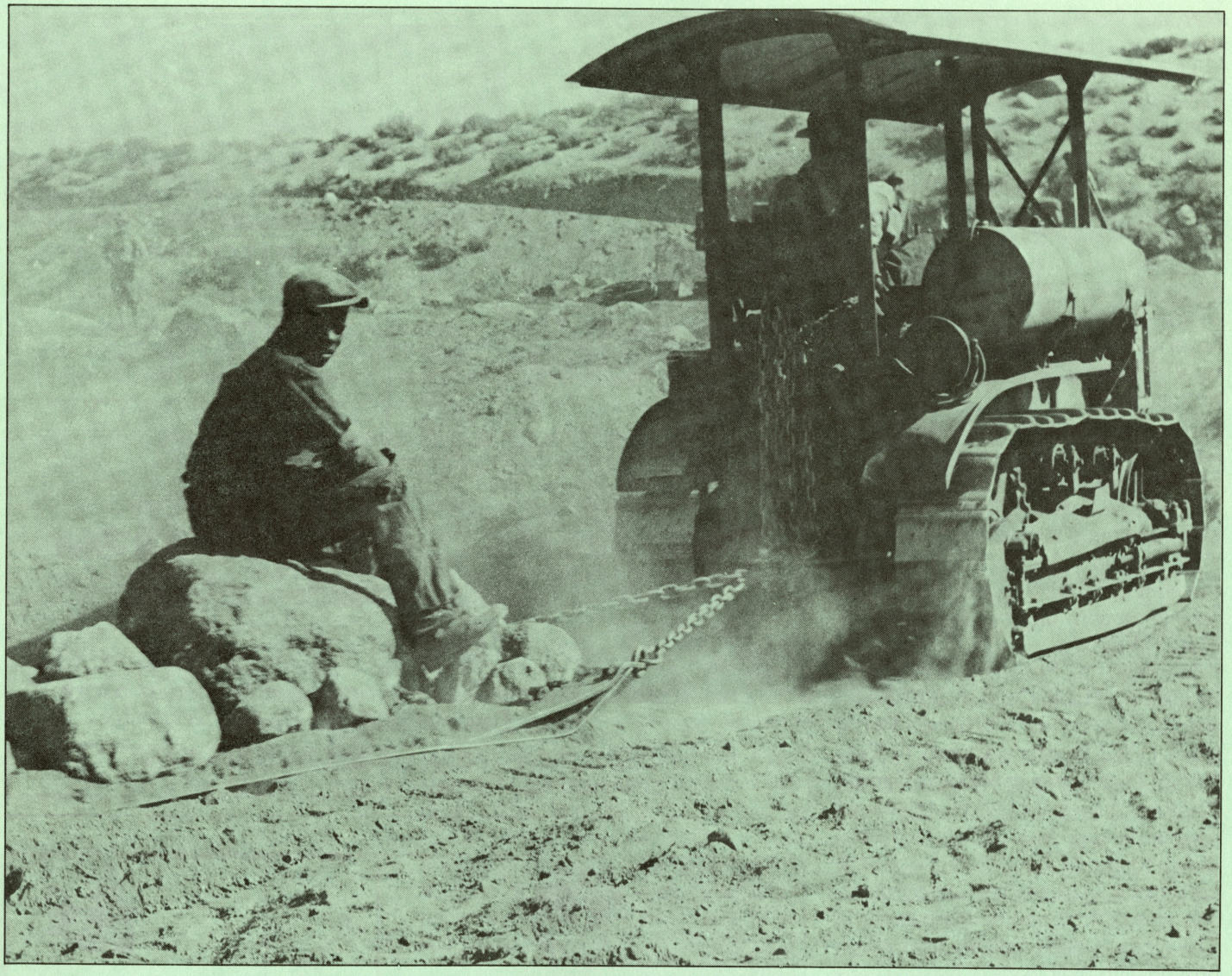


Photo from 1949, near Lone Pine Campground. . .smoothing the trail.

Whitney Portal and end at the summit near Trail Crest or one of the base camps. The train would return to Whitney Portal the next day. Only one mule was ever affected by the altitude. When he got to the top, he wobbled like the pack drunk — down the trail a little ways, he was fine again.

Early in the season, snow balling up in their hooves was a problem, and cleanings were required frequently. Sometimes special shoes were used so the mules would slip less on the rocks. Calks (corks) would be placed on the toe and heel of each shoe for traction. The rough terrain required shoes to be changed each month or sooner.

Of course, the trail was built by men. The Forest Service crews consisted mainly of miners. Relles Carrasco, Forest Service foreman from 1938 to 1948, tried some "college boys," but they couldn't adapt to the isolation. Carrasco told his trail boss, Henry Thorne, "Go to the bars, go to the pool halls, and find me the roughest, drunkenest miners you can find. I'll sober them up, put them to work, and you won't be able to find a harder-working crew." Go to work they did.

In June of 1938, dynamite had to be used to blast through the snow so the crew could work on the talus slope above Consultation Lake. On the steeper slopes, 2x12 boards were suspended by ropes to permit the men access with hand drills to set the dynamite. After the blast, the 2x12s were put up again to help the men clear the rubble. For the next three summers, the men labored with drills, picks and shovels to complete the trail.

The crews had voracious appetites. Supplying the men with good food and her cheerful manner was the job of Elizabeth, wife of Relles Carrasco. A quarter side of beef, a half case of eggs, breads, vegetables, fruits, and an endless variety of other foods were consumed each week. Liz depended upon an oil stove and a 12-inch square oven placed on top of a burner for all the cooking. When the weather turned cold, there was always soup and a warm word from Liz.

Trail construction was temporarily discontinued when World War II broke out. It was 1946 before construction could continue. The use of a 1000-lb. Schramm compressor made life a little easier for the drillers. It was disassembled and packed on several mules. A special pack saddle, an *aparejo,* had to be used. It had a very thick pad to protect the mule's back, and the compressor part was lashed on with rope. Some parts were so heavy that when the mule stopped for a breather, an "A" frame was placed

Created by man's monumental effort, the trail preserves nature's beauty.

under the load on each side of the mule.

The compressor made drilling easier, but the backbreaking work of rubble-clearing, dirt-hauling and trail-smoothing was the same. Finally, in 1948, the trail reconstruction was finished. The news spread quickly.

Before the construction crews were gone, Relles called Liz to their tent flap early in the morning. He pointed up to the talus slope. Climbing up the new trail were so many hikers that they reminded Liz of an anthill. It was a day of prophesy.

In 1974, a trail quota was put into effect to reduce environmental damage caused by overcrowded conditions. Streams and lakes were polluted, vegetation was dying in popular camping areas, and firewood was virtually non-existent from overuse.

To protect the fragile beauty of the land, the Forest Service instituted certain regulations:

Stock animals are prohibited for public safety on narrow switchbacks and to prevent overgrazing in the few meadows.

Campfires are not allowed because of the scarcity of firewood and to prevent damage to living trees.

Camping is not allowed at Mirror Lake and Trailside Meadow to prevent pollution and give vegetation a chance to re-establish itself.

Only 75 overnight backpackers are allowed to enter the trail daily at Whitney Portal to prevent overcrowding.

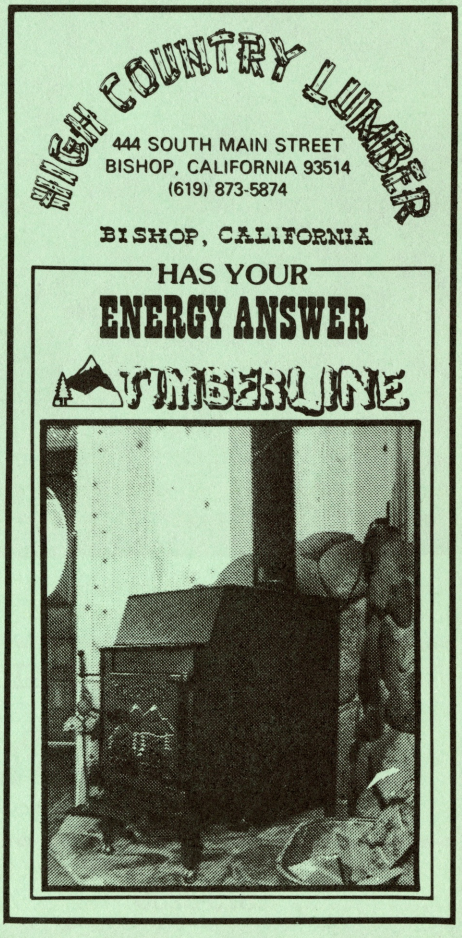
Everyone is asked to use the sanitary facilities at Outpost Camp and Trail Camp to reduce pollution from human waste.

Right now the trail is still suffering from overuse due to people ending their trip at Whitney Portal who started elsewhere. Of major concern is the removal of human waste along the trail. The Forest Service is looking at alternatives to managing human waste while still allowing a reasonable number of people to use the trail. Approximately five or six airlifts, at $500 a trip, are now made each year because of the volume of human waste.

To make trail reservations, it is suggested that you write or go in person to the Ranger Station after March 1. Phone reservations cannot be accepted due to decreases in personnel. Three choices of starting dates and entry points are encouraged to insure a reservation.

Another alternative to hiking the crowded Mount Whitney trail is a very pleasant day hike on the newly-established Whitney Portal National Recreation Trail. An easy car shuttle can be made between Whitney Portal and Lone Pine Campground, making the four-mile walk downhill very pleasant. There is no quota on this trail, and it follows the original trail used in the early 1900s to the 1930s. No campfires are allowed due to the high fire danger each summer.

In the tradition of Gustave Marsh, Hank Coulter, Relles and Liz Carrasco, the crews and the local community, it is expected that the personnel of the Mount Whitney Ranger District, with the support of everyone concerned, will preserve the Mount Whitney experience now and for the future. □



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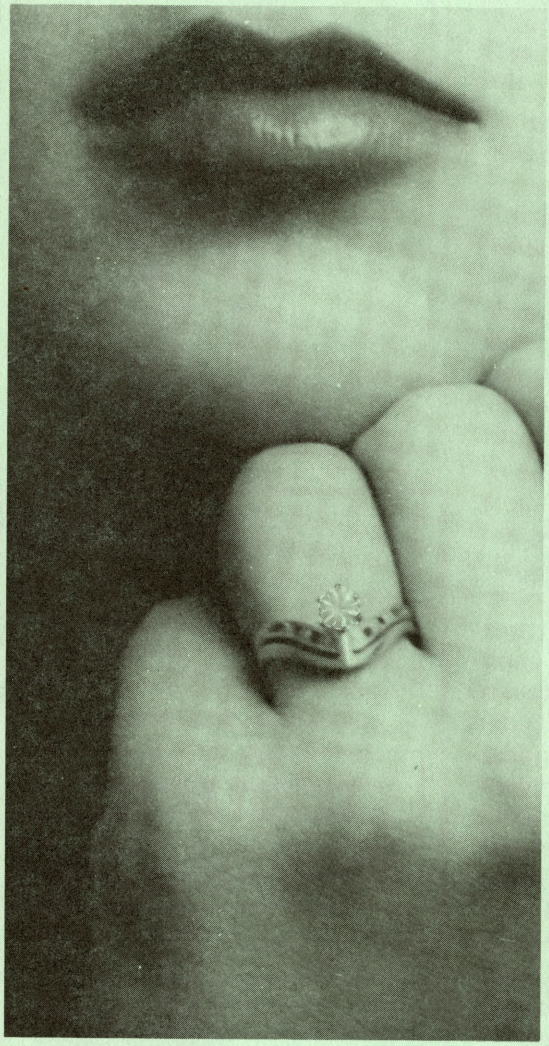

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THE MEMORIAL MULE

Story begins on next page

The Mule Days Parade of 1974 was led by Grand Marshal Ronald Reagan, then Governor of California.
Also shown is Honored Guest Norman 'Ike' Livermore, Director of the California Dept. of Resources.

by Bonnie Shields

For the last fifteen years, Memorial Day weekend in Bishop has been like no other anywhere on earth. And why is that, you might wonder? Well, it's because of mules, of course.

Back in 1970, it took 20 minutes for the forty-nine entries in the first Mule Days Parade to pass by. Last year, it took one and a half hours! No, the mules are not slower. There's just more of them. Five hundred, to be correct, and it's just the beginning of what they have in store for their human admirers for the weekend.

To quote master packer Bob Tanner, "A group of local packers, citizens and mule buffs, in 1970, envisioned a parade and small show in honor of the mule. They designated the event as Mule Day." From such modest beginnings, Mule Days in Bishop has grown into the premier mule event of the year, and the catalyst for many more mule events throughout the west.

Technically, Mule Days is operated out of the Bishop Chamber of Commerce, and organized and executed by a most outstanding group of local packers, businessmen and mule lovers. The majority of these fine folks have been involved with this event from

The Al Kaly Shrine Mule Train, of Colorado Springs and Pueblo, Colorado, is the only mounted patrol of its kind in the world.

the very beginning, injecting a continuity and state of organization quite remarkable. It all results in between thirty and forty thousand mule-lovers and just plain folks havin' a ball amid the splendor of the eastern Sierra.

For the serious participant, the festivities really get underway at the Friday night Mule Swampers Stomp at the Fairgrounds. Some claim this Friday night event is a carefully-planned elimination contest for the faint of heart, but the fact is it is just plain good fun. By Saturday morning you're either nothin' but pain, or no pain at all. The mules, on the other hand, being the wise creatures mule folks have always known they are, have been spending the night resting and reflecting and are feelin' just fine. And before you know it, it's parade time in Bishop.

Grand Marshal for this year's parade is Iron Eyes Cody, well known from movies, television commercials, and more importantly, for his participation in Native American causes throughout the country.

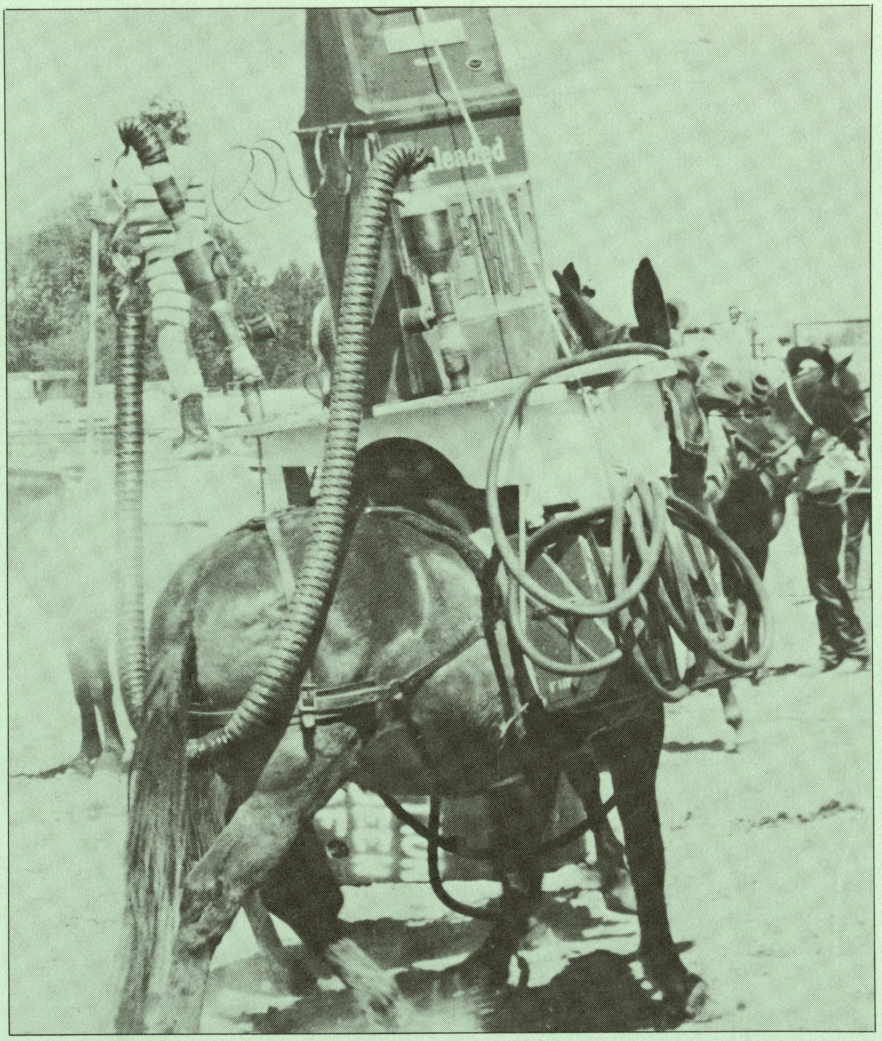
By two o'clock in the afternoon, the show proper begins, and since the packers play such an important role in Mule Days, what could be more proper to kick things off than packing contests. Everything from the ridiculous to the unbelievable winds up on the backs of our friends the mules. One dear creature was seen packing a full-size gas pump marked MULE-A-HAUL. Could very well be the fuel of the future. The imagination of the packers is only limited by what he can persuade some mule into toting.

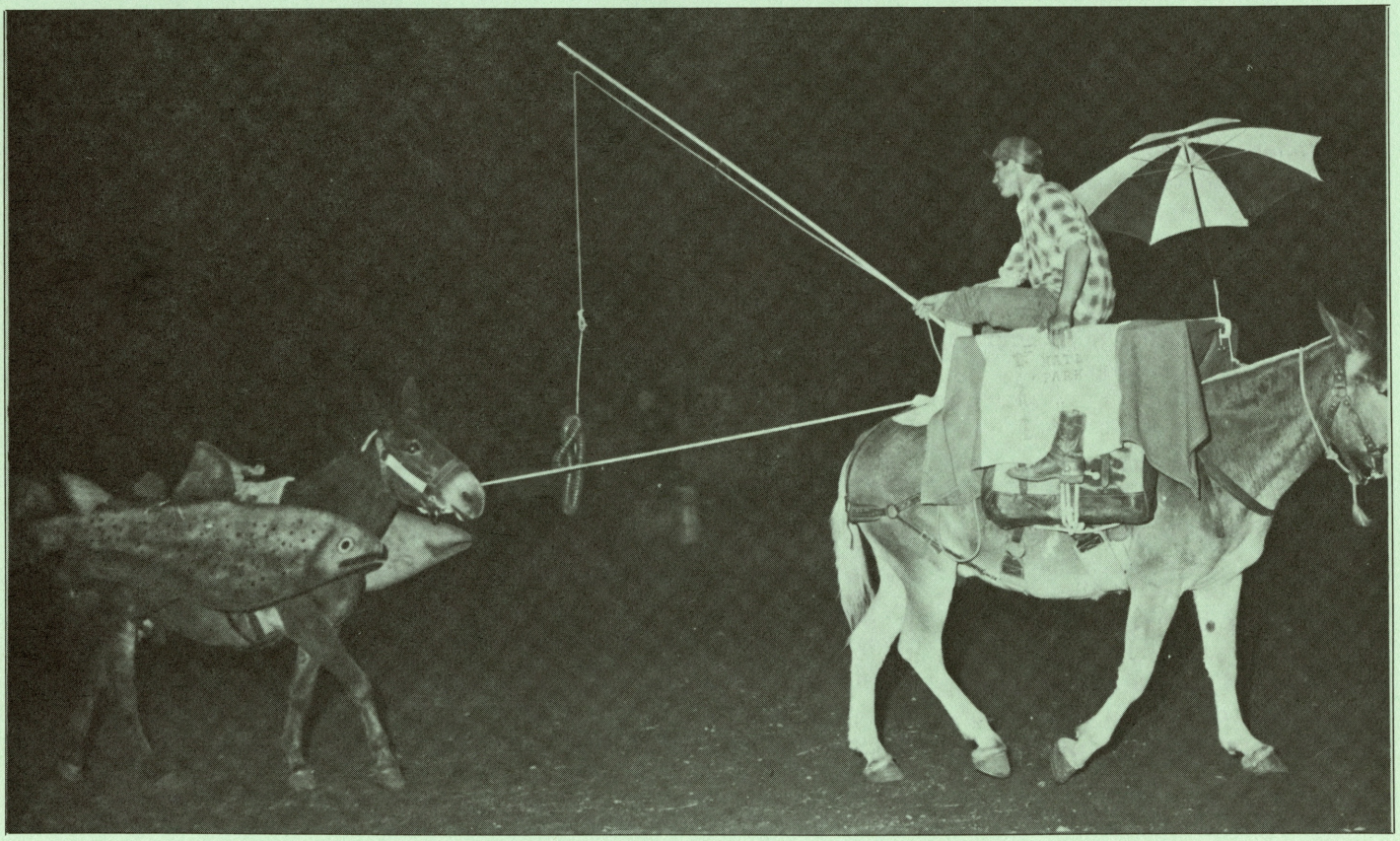
After the keyhole races, "Wrong Way" Bobby Tanner prepares to dazzle and dumbfound all within eye-shot with a new attempt at the World's Biggest Pack String. Bobby has been participating in Mule Days since he was knee-high to a jack, and usually has something cooked up special for the occasion. He picked up the moniker "Wrong Way" some years ago when his

racing mule insisted on running his own races — in the wrong direction. Then, back in '77, Bobby once again wrote mule history by putting together 50 mules in one string. Ambition and Bobby being what they are, well enough couldn't be left alone, and so enter our hero with a new record, 51 mules, all packed and tied to one horse. Hurray for our hero-o-o-ooh, what is THIS? Wait a long-eared minute! What is this cloud of mule-dust in the distance?

Word comes up to the announcer's stand. It's the Amalgamated Get Bobby Tanner At All Costs Association, and they're out for blood. Seems the rest of the packers had scraped and scrounged and 'ass-sembled' a string of 54 mules, and they were bearing down on "Wrong Way" at a high rate of confusion. Fate being what it is, they met in mid-arena, and you never in your life saw the likes of the wrecks, flyin' mules, run-aways, and flyin' packers! One hundred and five mules. One hundred and five fertile mule minds at work. Two hundred and ten flyin' heels, and all on only two strings. . . whoops, three strings. Whoops, six. . . twelve? Well, maybe you get the picture. It's glorious!

The afternoon finishes out (for the survivors) with races, jumping contests

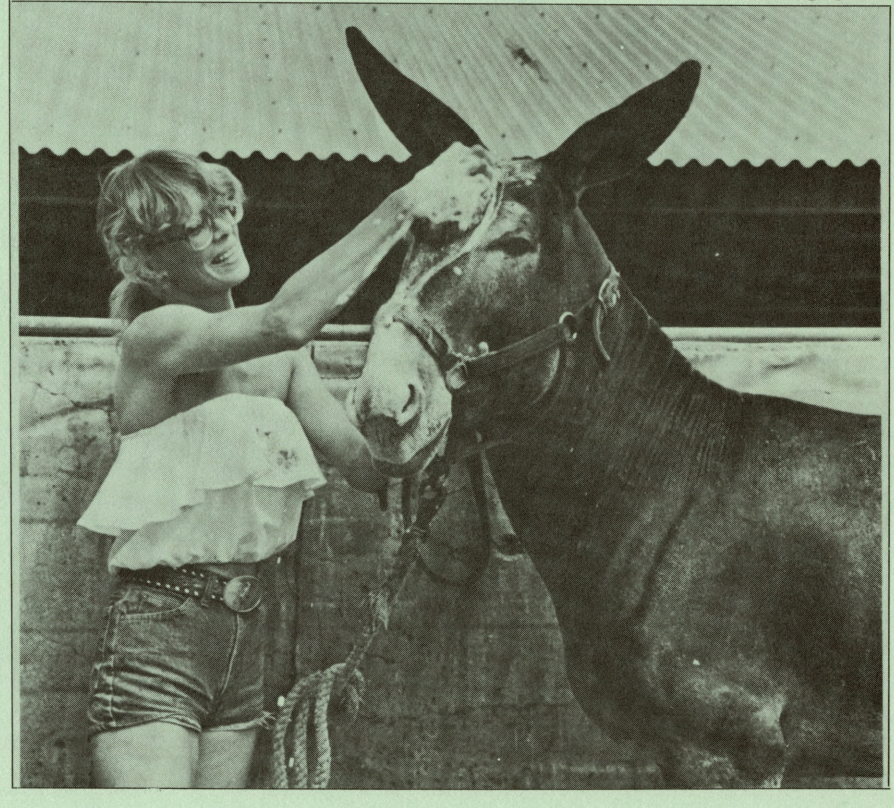




above: D. Bauman photo
below: Chris Cavanaugh photo

and the ever-popular wild mule packing. And that is exactly what it is — packing unbroken 'wild' mules. We'll let your own imagination work on THAT one.

Saturday night the largest crowd in all the fifteen years will turn out for the evening performance. It starts off with everyone who has a team and wagon climbing into the arena for a special driving exhibition. Sorta like the freeway at five, but no one gets killed. There are about 14 rigs in all, from eight-ups of the magnificent draft mules and mini-mules to one elegant donkey and cart. Then it's race time again. You ain't lived 'til you've seen a mule all goggled and geared and flyin' low. And, the farther they go, the less anybody knows how it will turn out. Racing is followed by the box hitch finals and the frantic mule shoeing contest. No, the mules aren't frantic, only the shoers. Top contenders usually dispatch their skills on Mr. Mule in five minutes or less.



All this, dear readers, leads up to the premier event of the evening, according to some. Yes, it's finally time for the appearance of the Official Mule Days Drill Team (and Part-Time Buckin' Society). Just the idea of precision mules does something severe to the soul, don't you think? Anyway, though words can hardly do justice to the subject, we must try anyway.

'Organized' about 30 minutes before show time, the undaunted practice a full ten minutes. As it turns out, only two members have ever done anything like this in their entire lives, so they are put in front. Off they go to battle — or is it cross-fires, circles and giant revolving wheels? Yes, it is coming true. Precision Mules! I can hear their leader's parting words as they charge into the arena: "I asked for the Cavalry and what do I get — MULES!"

Meantime, back in the arena and unknown to the first few pairs, the drill team has grown at the last minute with the addition of our hero of the afternoon, "Wrong Way." Riding one of his gentle beasties, "Wrong Way" proceeds to buck his way into center stage, and into the hearts of mule-lovers everywhere, not to mention their laps. When it's all over, they'll get a standing ovation. . . or is that the first five rows evacuating?

Continuing with the example of excitement set by the drill team, the evening concludes with the wild and wooly chariot races, team packing, more flat races, pole bending, musical tires, and the indescribable braying contest (you've got to see this to believe it!).

Sunday morning is the time for the many halter classes for saddle and pack mules and the jack show. Eliminations are run in reined mules, trail mules and the quality shoeing contest is conducted. The pulling contest gets so serious, they pull all the available weights and have to substitute people for cinder blocks. It's all the same to the mules.

Sunday afternoon sees more races,

the steer roping, pleasure class, packing, and the mass confusion called *run-ride-lead.* To top it all off, there is a special contest to determine the oldest pack mule.

Finally, it's Sunday evening show time again. Time for the second installment of the famous Mule Days Drill Team — minus the Buckin' Society. As before, it only takes 30 minutes to get into the proper state of preparation. However, this time practice is seriously complicated by the condition of the arena itself. You see, it's set up for the finals in the trail mule class, and it's chock full of what truly qualifies as Ob-Stackels. In fact, the giant revolving wheel comes up flat, and the cross-fires misfire completely. It has to be an omen. And just to complete the catastrophy, the routine is completely changed from Saturday's performance. None the less, the overture rings out, the lights come on and away they go. Into the jaws of death ride the 300 — or maybe it is only 25. Whatever, things go like clockwork for a full five seconds before the leaders peel off into opposite directions, instead of the circle they had practiced.

Dear hearts, I wish I could relate some shining tale of success and glory, but the truth is it goes downhill from this point on. It finally disintegrates into a giant hide-and-seek, and *Where the ** is the leader* game. The grandstand loves it, heartless bunch! As it dissolves into the final wreck, it's hard to tell who is laughing the hardest, the audience or the team itself. So much for Precision Mules. But there is an ugly rumor that the team members have joined in a cold-blooded pact to return in 1984. Shows you what a low-down bunch they turned out to be. Consider yourself forewarned.

For the rest of the evening, the fans are treated to the trail mule finals, reining mules, more races and packing contests, and the team-roping event. As per tradition, the final event is the Mile Mule Run.

Monday morning is the big mule sale, where the poor humans bitten with MuleMania can indulge their weakness. In 1983, thirty-three mules were sold. A matched pair of mules were purchased by George Higgson for $2,925, and a single mule sold for $1,800 to George Chamberlain. These were the highest-priced at auction last year.

For a mule, fifteen years is only a fair beginning. Why don't you plan on being in Bishop on Memorial Day Weekend to see what happens? Only the mules know, and they aren't telling.

For information on Mule Days events, contact the Bishop Chamber of Commerce, 690 North Main Street, Bishop, CA 93514. □

SMISER MULES

One of the main attractions of the 1984 Mule Days Celebration wil be the Smiser Freight Lines mule-drawn vehicles. Sam Smiser and a good number of his 42 mules will be on hand to entertain the 'Mule Days folk' with an array of mule-drawn entries.

Included in this impressive display will be a beautiful eight-mule hitch pulling a freight wagon purchased by Smiser from MGM in Hollywood for some $15,000. Sam has another "few thousand" tied up in some of the classiest harness equipment that one would ever want to see. Besides the main attraction, there will be 6-mule, 4-mule and 2-mule hitches, with both regular-sized mules and mini-mules.

The 8-up hitch is comprised of Champion Draft Mules, each standing about 15 hands and weighing 1300 pounds. The Draft Mules are the result of a cross between a Mammoth Jack (male donkey) and a Belgian Draft mare (female horse). Because of their carefully selected background, it is estimated the famous 8-up hitch of Smiser Mules are strong enough to have done the work of the well-known 20 Mule Team, if the giant draft mules had been available then.

Since their adoption in 1976 as the official mascot of Smiser Freight Service, the Smiser Mule Train has traveled throughout the state. In their appearances at fairs, rodeos and parades, including the Pasadena Tournament of Roses, the Smiser Mule Train serves as a living reminder of the debt each American owes to these strong, patient animals.

Mules played an important part in the western expansion of our young nation. They aided the first settlers in their struggle to take raw land and turn it into productive farms and cities. In World War I, mules supplied much of the transportation needs of the armed forces, delivering supplies and moving artillery with excellent dependability.

Today's trucking industry can trace its earliest history back to the strong and willing mule. Smiser Freight Service is proud to be a part of that modern, efficient transportation system which serves our nation so well, and is pleased to present the Champion Smiser Mule Train as part of our American heritage.

The 8-mule hitch of the Smiser Freight Lines is always a favorite in the Mule Days Parade.

Sam Smiser grew up in Missouri; he has a background that has allowed him to develop a great love for his mules. Each year he makes a pilgrimage back to his home state to get the best mules money can buy. His current selection of mules are worth upwards of $3,000 each.

If you ask Smiser what makes a good mule, he'll tell you: "It's got to have a good head, just like a Baptist preacher and it's got to have a good chest, just as big as a turkey and it's got to have a big butt, just like an old school marm." It is obvious that Sam Smiser knows his mules. It is also a good indication as to why he has gained the respect and admiration of the many people who have been in touch with the magnificent mule movement of the last fifteen years.

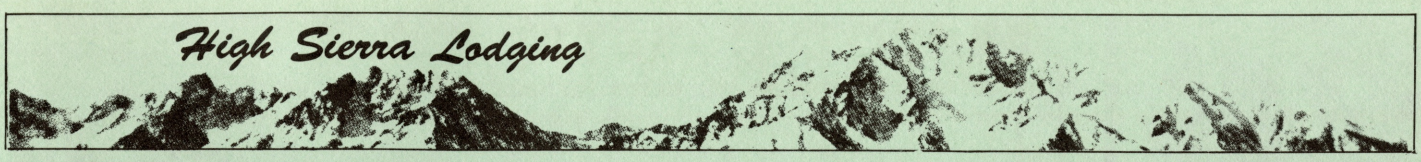
IRON EYES CODY

Iron Eyes Cody, well-known Hollywood celebrity and supporter of the welfare of the American Indian, will be the Grand Marshal for this year's Mule Days Celebration.

Iron Eyes is best known for his many appearances in Western movies throughout the years. He has become perhaps the most famous Indian celebrity in the world.

He has made numerous appearances in the Rose Parade, as well as in the prestigious Hollywood Christmas Parade.

In becoming the Grand Marshal for this year's Celebration, Iron Eyes will be joining a list of celebrities that have served in this important capacity in the past. This list includes such notables as Ronald Reagan (then Governor of California), Slim Pickens, Montie Montana (a good friend of Iron Eyes), Bob Mathias and Christine Lund.



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BISHOP'S BAG PIPE BAND AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

by Thaddeus W. Taylor, III

There are many opinions as to the true cradle of Western civilization. Greece and Rome both claim to be the spring from which Western thought flowed; modern man has watched this trickle reach its crest as it approached the New World and finally crashed like a great wave upon the cultural event that is the western shore of the USA.

The fact that civilization did not reach California in force until late in man's evolution is apparent. There is, however, some indication that the socio-political phenomenon known as Western thought and culture has indeed now established itself firmly in this State, as well as in every other nation in North America.

This movement towards democratic government and personal liberty, traveling from its rude beginnings in Greece and Rome, through Northern Europe, and eventually to California, must have a common denominator. Is it the bagpipe?

The ancient Greeks had pipes, consisting of carved tubes tied in a row and blown through by the musician. But long pieces of music requiring many notes close together were very hard to play, due to the human requirement for oxygen. If mosaics, vases and statuary are any indication, these pipers also had more serious limitations: hairy legs, horns, small split hooves and elfin tails appear to have been common. This sort of frivolity did not seem to appeal to the practical men of that day, but apparently the music of the pipes did.

When the Romans made their first deep forays into central Africa, places like Nubia and the Sudan provided some rough campaigning, due to the extremes in the environment, hostile residents, and naturally, because 300 miles is a long way to walk. One can only guess what kind of biological goodies the boys from central Italy came away with, but in a musical sense they scored an enigma: bagpipes.

Some folks claim that the Great Fire of Rome occurred not while Nero fiddled, but while he piped. It is interesting to note that although the Romans took the pipes everywhere to campaign and subsequently conquer, the bagpipes remain the instrument of choice in a place the Romans were unable to subdue. . . Scotland.

It seems odd, too, that a form of music that so many people find less than pleasing has so many fans. It is no coincidence that when bagpipes went to new lands, they usually traveled with military units, which had to fight with the locals if they intended to stay, which of course they did. To say that all the trouble was over bagpipes would be presumptuous, even for me.

The British, whose love-hate relationship with the pipes is notorious, recognized bagpipe music to have a strange enervating effect upon troops. This was especially unpleasant when it emboldened your foe, while scaring you witless.

After the fall of the House of Stuart, the British Tudors made the public playing of the pipes, as well as the

wearing of a clan tartan, illegal. From time to time, the playing of the pipes was made illegal in Ireland as well as Scotland. It is believed this decree was politically motivated, and not aesthetic. The undying desire that these people had to preserve their identities is evident in that the art of piping did not die, although the ruling invaders made piping a crime punishable by death.

Probably figuring that the old notion, "if you can't lick'em, join'em" could be improved upon, the British set out to do just that. They incorporated Irish and Scottish units into their military establishments. These Celtic and Gaelic units brought along their pipes.

Confronting the New World, the British Army used war pipes on their three major campaigns: one win (1763), one loss (1776), and one draw (1812). The British Army has employed pipes in every campaign since. The Scots Guards took Tumbledown Mountain during the battle for Port Stanley in the Faulkland Islands, 1982. A new tune, 'The Crags of Tumbledown', commemorates their desperate and bloody victory.

Today, many U.S. cities and publicly-recognized organizations (the Los Angeles Police Department, for example), have pipe bands. There are pipe bands on military reservations (Camp Pendleton), and even in U.S. high schools and colleges.

Why?

I don't know.

I'm in one, and I don't know.

I was ten years old when I first saw the movie Gunga Din with Victor McLaglen. It created a desire that I effectively suppressed for over a quarter of a century: *I wanted to be the drum major in a bagpipe band.*

The ultimate realization of this dream occurred because I moved to Bishop and developed a toothache. I was finally recruited, by my dentist.

After Gunga Din but before the dentist, there were only two resurgences of my clandestine affection for the pipes.

Immediately following my first viewing of Gunga Din, I purchased a bagpipe recording. I still have it and it is in good condition, as my mother didn't much like the noise emanating from her hi-fi and compelled me to desist.

The second and last time I visited my muse, in public anyhow, was when I hired a piper to perform at a Hail and Farewell Party for my military intelligence unit. On a lovely Far Eastern summer evening, as the sunset's brilliant colors reflected off the large French doors, a piper of the nearby Black Watch regiment fired up his bag and slow-marched through the party. He was a big hit with the intelligent types, after they determined they were not under attack.

Subsequently, I invited this piper to play at my own private parties. Soon fewer and fewer people accepted my invitations. My Asian landlord was too polite to say anything. He was sure that some sort of spiritual or metaphysical event was in progress. In a sense, of course, he was correct.

Back to the dentist. . . he told me of Bishop's Own Bagpipe Band that would be playing in the next Mule Days Parade. I went. I saw the pipers who looked like the Scotties on their way to rescue Gunga Din, in white sun helmets, kilts, the whole nine yards. I was conquered. I was beside myself looking for the recruiting officer.

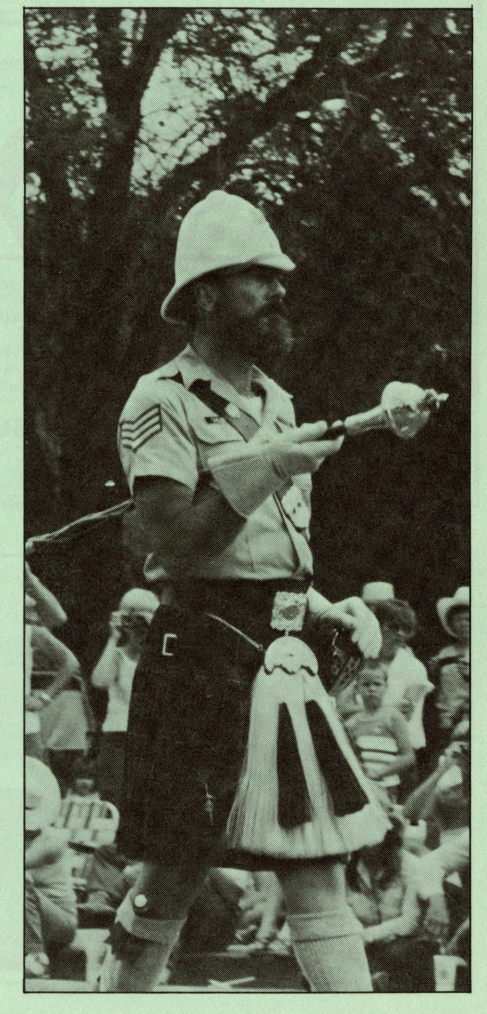
The musical band is one of the oldest organizational structures still in existence, and is relatively unaltered by travel through time and unchafed by the friction of changing fashion (unions notwithstanding). The Zen of bandsmanship seems to require acceptance of the notion that every band, every man, has two faces: One is exposed to the world; the other is turned inward. A marching band imposes an increased degree of discipline upon its members, much as civilization does to us all. A Scottish military marching band imposes substantially more discipline than, for example, the El Segundo High School Band.

After all, it's the Black Watch, the Seaforth Highlanders, the Argyles and the other famous regiments that piped in the dawn of Western Civilization to Africa, India, Afghanistan, Arabia, and New Orleans.

So on to Mule Days, Bishop, California. After the road has been smeared with the offerings of innumerable mules attempting to fertilize U.S. 395, the crowd reacts enthusiastically to a group of gentlemen attired in starched khaki shirts, Army helmets (1875, British), kilts, white spats, and whatever else they deem prudent on a hot and dry day.

These gallant men are living proof that the "highest form of civilization thus far in man's history is the small American city." (The **London Economist**, June 1976) They bring to us also a celebration of democracy. . . let me digress slightly. . . it was, after all, the British Army which conquered India while using the bagpipe, then later piped themselves out, leaving behind the largest democracy the world has ever known. And to confuse matters, the truth is that Gunga Din was in actuality filmed in the Alabama Hills outside of Lone Pine. This may shed some light on a bagpipe band in Bishop, although I'm not quite sure how. . .

The Loch Ness Scots of Bishop originally consisted entirely of ex-military men, very interesting when coupled with the knowledge that it is composed of volunteers. The newer recruits are not veterans, a fact that pleases some bandsmen. Things are



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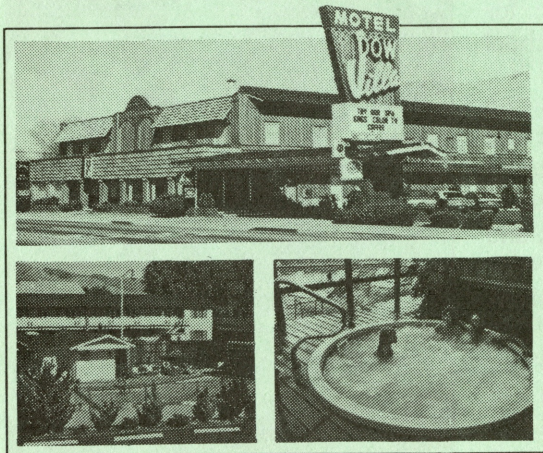

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going well in the advancement of civilization when the nation's military produces few veterans, and fewer widows.

The gentlemen of The Band:

Pipe Major Douglas Buchanan, attorney, Smith & Buchanan; veteran, U.S. Army, Dominican Republic campaign.

Pipe Major Emeritus W/O Brian C. Miller, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service; veteran, U.S. Army, 6th Army Pipe Band.

Drum Major Thaddeus W. Taylor, III, stockbroker, Dean Witter Reynolds, Inc.; veteran, U.S. Army military intelligence, Korea and the Pacific theater.

Pipe Sergeant E. Joseph Duncan, D.D.S., dentist; veteran, U.S. Army, 25th Division, Republic of Vietnam.

Drum Sergeant Gordon Strachan, Mammoth Lakes High school teacher, retired; veteran, U.S. Navy, World War II.

L/Cpl. John McLennan, M.D., orthopedic surgeon; veteran, UCLA, with amphibious assaults on S. Calif. beaches.

L/Cpl. Michael Shehorn, proprietor of Shehorn Electric, Crowley Lake; veteran, U.S. Air Force, Republic of Vietnam.

Corporal Jim Cameron, commercial officer, California Highway Patrol; veteran, U.S. Marine Corps.

Corporal Michael Dunlap, Lieutenant, Bishop area commander, California Highway Patrol; veteran, U.S. Navy, submarine service, Pacific theater.

L/Cpl. J. Stanley Gillman, TV producer and station manager; veteran, U.S. Navy, Aleutian campaign, World War II.

L/Cpl. Morgan C. Taylor, attorney; refugee from Newport Beach, California.

L/Cpl. Andrew Buchanan, student and the boss' son.

L/Cpl. Mike Cook, manager of Wilson's Photo Lab; Signals N.C.O. (he takes our pictures).

The Rev. Ron Roberts, First United Methodist Church, Bishop. (our chaplain)

SADDLE CITY

by Marty Forstenzer

Bishop, California, already known as the Mule Capital of the World, is acquiring a new distinction — capital of custom saddlemaking. Currently, there are five custom saddlemakers operating in Bishop, a remarkable number for a community of 10,000 people. That number is more remarkable considering that there are estimated to be only 100 high-grade custom saddlemakers in the Western United States. All of the Bishop craftsmen are turning out products of the highest quality.

Lee Roeser has been making saddles in the Eastern Sierra for a number of years, and recently opened a shop in Bishop, The Lee Roeser Saddle Company. Lee worked for many years as a packer for his father's Mammoth Lakes Pack Outfit. He remembers an early interest in repairing saddles at the pack station, and of trying to think of ways to improve them. "If you have to ride a lot," he says, "you spend a lot of time thinkin' of how to make saddles more comfortable."

He later worked for two years for a saddle shop in Wheatland, California. Roeser credits two of the other Bishop saddlemakers, Ted Schindler and R.B. Witman, with influencing his saddlemaking style.

The Coleville native says that most of his customers are primarily interested in how the saddle fits. "People who ride a lot want something comfortable," he explains. "They want a saddle that won't make the horse sore, so it has to fit a certain way."

With his assistant, Dave Hoover, Roeser plans to turn out about 15 saddles this year. He makes custom saddles by mail order, and is currently putting together a mail order brochure. Some of his saddles will be displayed at a booth during Mule Days in Bishop.

One of Roeser's influences, R.B. Witman, has been in business in Bishop since 1973. He worked in the Sierra for nine years as a packer for Dudley Boothe, before moving to Wyoming to attend the Brand's School of Western Saddlery. He later worked at Connolly's Saddlery in Billings, Montana, where he gained much of his saddlemaking expertise.

Although he does repairs on any type of saddle, the ones he makes are all Western style. He says that many of the

An R.B. Witman saddle

saddles he has made recently are the 'A-fork' type, a style which was popular in the late 1800s and is now becoming popular again. Witman produces about 20 saddles a year, in addition to making chaps, harnesses, and "just about anything you can use on a horse."

In 1983, John Costanza opened the Costanza Saddle Shop in Bishop. He has years of riding experience, and in Arizona belonged to a Memorial Cavalry Regiment which re-enacted scenes from Cavalry days. For many years, he made saddles as a hobby while working as a mechanic for a Toyota dealership in Tucson. Eventually deciding to quit and go into saddlemaking full time, he attended the Texas Trails Saddle School in Pine Bluffs, Wyoming. "I just figured I'd try to make a living at something I enjoy," he explains.

Costanza says he is not tied to any particular saddlemaking style, but will make whatever the customer wants. In addition to making and repairing saddles, he makes tack, belts and holsters.

Two other saddlemakers, Ted Schindler and Chuck Dennis, are currently operating out of Schindler's West Bishop shop. Each has owned saddle shops in other areas, the former in Bakersfield, and the latter in Escondido and later in Oregon.

Ted Schindler has 35 years of saddlemaking experience, and used to teach saddlemaking in Southern California. Although he now makes saddles on a part-time basis, he supplies custom saddles by mail order for customers throughout the United States.

Chuck Dennis, a saddlemaker for 21 years, has been living in the Eastern Sierra since 1979. In addition to working full time making saddles, he makes custom leather purses and belts. Both of these craftsmen turn out work of the highest quality.

The advantages of a custom saddle over an assembly-line model are both functional and esthetic. Custom saddlemakers are able to pay attention to details that determine a saddle's comfort and durability. For example, instead of trying to use every inch of a hide, they cut each piece from the part of the hide best suited to that piece's function on the saddle. They are more careful about cutting, stitching and other phases of the saddlemaking process. In addition, they work only with the finest grades of leather available.

The saddlemaking process follows certain basic steps. Because making the tree, or wooden base of the saddle, requires an involved and expensive process, most saddlemakers buy them from tree-making experts. For example, Roeser gets his trees from specialists in Utah and Idaho.

The saddlemaker's first major step is building the groundseat in layers out of thick skirting leather. Then, the leather rigging is cut and fit, then removed for

continued on page 47

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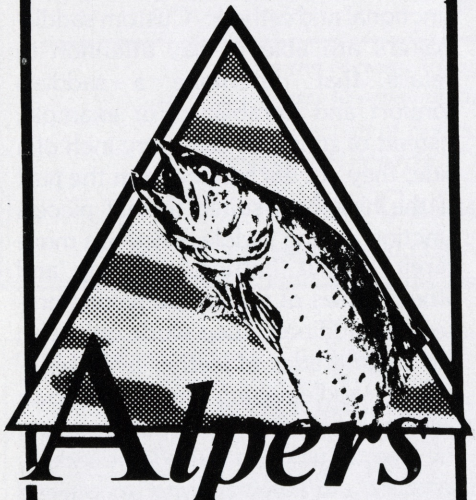

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Sport Notes

10% CATCH 90%

by Jim Brock

It is an old saying, but still true today, that 10 percent of the fishermen catch 90 percent of the fish. Maybe it is a good thing, or the Dear Lord and the Fish & Game wouldn't be able to keep up enough production.

There is no reason that more of the 90 percent couldn't increase their success by following some of the methods of the 10 percent. Not many people drive Model T cars now, so why rig and fish the way Granddad did on the farm in Missouri?

Today's equipment is far superior to anything that was available in the 30s or 40s, and that goes for rods, reels, line and terminal tackle such as hooks, swivels, etc. Sure, there are still some who swear by the old bamboo fly rod, but it can't match up to the ease of a day of fishing with one of the new graphite rods.

Trollers are experiencing greater success by using a conventional level wind reel with 18-pound lead core line and 30 feet of leader. This gets the lure or bait down to the level where the fish are feeding. The depth can be changed as the water temperature increases. You are able to go back to the same depth after catching a fish, by letting out the same amount of colors.

You are bait fishing a lake, and all of a sudden the fish start working the surface. Don't continue to fish 20 or 30 feet below them! Either go to lures, or better yet, a bubble and a fly. Put a Castabubble, half full of water, on your line and tie on a snap swivel. To this, attach 5 to 6 feet of 1- or 2-pound test leader with a fly. The weight of the water in the bubble gives you the distance in your cast. This method of rigging is also very good when using bait in lieu of the fly.

Some people like to fish the streams, but have little luck unless the fish plant truck just stopped. In the small clear streams, try a 2-pound test leader with a small split shot 10 to 12 inches above the bait. Get behind a tree or bush above where you figure the fish are, then let the bait drift down to that spot.

A good basic rig, when bait fishing in lakes, is a sliding sinker (looks like a football with a hole through it) on your line. Attach a snap swivel to the line, and tie on a 3-4 foot leader. This works great if you are not fishing a lake loaded with boulders and keep getting snagged. In this case, it would be better to use a dissolving sinker or a Casta-bubble in lieu of the sliding sinker.

Now that the chances of catching are better, don't lose sight of the fact there is more to the joy of fishing than having to come in with a limit. What greater thrill can there be, but to fight a fish, know you have it whipped, and release it to fight another day! So what if you don't have a limit to dangle under your neighbor's nose? You know you caught fish, had your fun fishing, and realize the released fish will be there to be caught again another day.

It is much better to limit your kill, than it is to kill your limit. □

Jim Brock has been in the sporting goods business in Bishop for many years. He is an avid outdoorsman and fisherman, and has written several articles for the ***Western Outdoor News*** *through the years. He has also put together one of the best fishing and camping maps available in the Sierra, available free at his store on the corner of Main and Line Streets in Bishop.*

"Let the blessing of St. Peter's Master be. . . upon all that are lovers of virtue; and dare trust in His providence; and be quiet; and go a-Angling."

COMPLEAT ANGLER, Izaak Walton (1593-1683)

"My husband's a fisherman. He'll stand knee-deep in that icy water for 3 hours waiting for a nibble, but you should hear the racket if he has to wait 10 minutes for me to get ready."

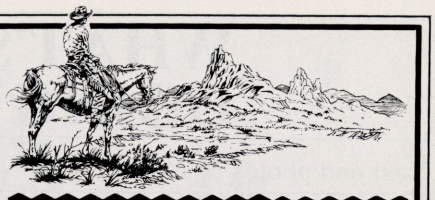
Name Withheld by Request, Bishop (1984)

A Lee Roeser saddle.

any handtooling to be done before they are screwed and nailed on. The fork cover goes on next, followed by the leather seat cover and stirrup leathers. Finally, any special finishing touches or decorations are added. The saddlemakers estimate that it takes between 50 and 100 hours to make a saddle, depending on the type of saddle and the decoration involved.

Because there is not enough demand in a city the size of Bishop to keep them all busy, most of the saddlemakers rely on orders from around the United States, with the majority of those orders coming from Southern California and Nevada. As these craftsmen continue to turn out their high grade of product, Bishop is beginning to become known as a center of custom saddlemaking. □

Lee Roeser at work.



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Ted Schindler
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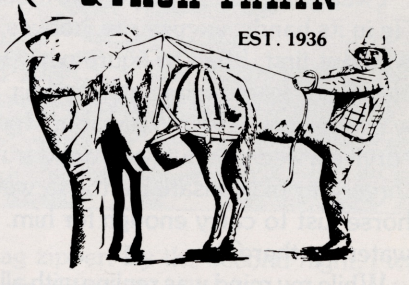

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WHAT'S A NICE GIRL LIKE ME DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?

Text and photos by Marie Taylor

One day last May, my husband phoned from work with "good news." He had arranged our August vacation as a horseback trip into the High Sierra. I hung up the phone, my heart pounding. Not from excitement, but terror!

You see, even though I'd lived the last three years in Bishop, and before then spent over 30 years near San Francisco, I was not a "western gal." I encouraged trips to Hawaii during ski season. I thought pitons were a sort of Armenian crouton. I saw the neighborhood kids casually riding by on their ponies and quivering, kept my secret — I had never been on a horse.

My first encounter alone with a horse was the day a neighbor's pony wandered through our newly-planted lawn to a corner of alfalfa. Putting my city-bred fingers close to that enormous munching mouth, I grabbed at the reins and tried to pull it away. Fortunately, a neighbor saw me and waved her hands frantically until I got the message to slip the reins over its head. The pony followed me obediently up our front walk. I went back into my house so nobody could see me shaking.

I was going to be riding one of those creatures, putting my life in its hands, excuse me, hooves. I considered writing a will. But first, I had to figure what to take. An absence of electricity would eliminate my hair dryer, hot rollers, and wafflemaker — help! What about food? I didn't think I could survive a week on nuts and dried fruit. And water? With my three-year-old's insatiable thirst, we'd have to get an extra horse just to carry enough for him. Or could we drink the water up there?

While my mind was reeling with all the possible problems, my husband came home, saw my scribbled lists of things I couldn't forget, and burst out laughing. He handed me two neatly-printed sheets of paper. One was a suggested list of clothing and necessities for the trip. The other was a detailed menu — breakfasts, lunches, dinners. From hot coffee, sausage and eggs in the morning, to roast beef and apple pie in the evening. Things were beginning to look up.

We paid a pre-trip visit to our chosen packer, McGee Creek. I met Butch, a big brown horse. She (yes, she) looked me over, and decided right away *this lady might be trouble.* I guess she enjoyed her outings in the mountains and didn't want to be relegated to a flatland pasture, so she stood quietly while I put a trembling foot in the stirrup and swung my body up, up, up into the saddle. I was awfully high off the ground, I thought. Maybe they had a shorter horse? The kind folks just smiled, and lowered the stirrups.

Butch and I walked around for a while, and I was taught how to hold on and steer and use the brakes. It wasn't too bad. In fact, it was kind of fun.

Two weeks later, we were off. All our gear had been stowed on mules, and I had a small backpack of necessities: mosquito repellent, toilet paper, Dramamine, and a flask of brandy. I was helped onto my horse, Robby. I was a bit apprehensive about this new animal, since I had expected Butch again, but she was out on a pack trip already. In a way, it was comforting to know that another person who had needed Butch was already out in the Wilderness, and had been there for *three* days.

Robby got in line behind the lead horse, a blackish-looking creature named Brown. I'm sure my husband with our son Daniel were behind me, because I could hear them talking. . . were they *singing?* I didn't dare turn around. I was watching the trail — every rock, every hole, every twist and turn. But after about ten minutes, I loosened my white-knuckle grip and made two astonishing discoveries: First of all, it didn't seem to make much difference what I did, Robby was possessed with unswerving devotion to the rump end of Brown, and would probably follow him to the ends of the earth. Secondly, we were in some absolutely gorgeous country!

We passed through a valley bursting with every color wildflower imaginable, above us breathtaking mountains and a dazzling blue sky. It was magical — like someone had plunked me into the pages of a gigantic scenic calendar. Robby plodded along, nodding his head, and I began nodding mine. I was in a trance, for how long I don't know, until snap — the spell was broken — not by any of my worst imagined fears, but because my ears popped! I was really out in the great Sierra wilderness, on a *horse,* and I was actually enjoying myself.

We stopped for lunch next to a grassy meadow, and I was bursting with confidence. While my husband wandered down to the stream to look for fish, Daniel scampered through the meadow, and our trail guide Natasha prepared lunch (yes, the water was drinkable up here), I lay back and daydreamed about being a rugged pioneer woman in this easy, peaceful life.

After lunch, back onto the horses and the trail again. We came to an area that reminded me of the old Lone Ranger TV shows: some big rocks, gnarled pines, little trails meandering off. We turned onto one of those trails, and the daydreaming stopped as abruptly as the path went UP. Not up, like the business end of a playground slide, but up like

boulders in a zig-zag pattern to the sky. Robby stepped up. I held on for dear life. We were entering The Chute. Natasha suggested, "lean forward." No foolin' !

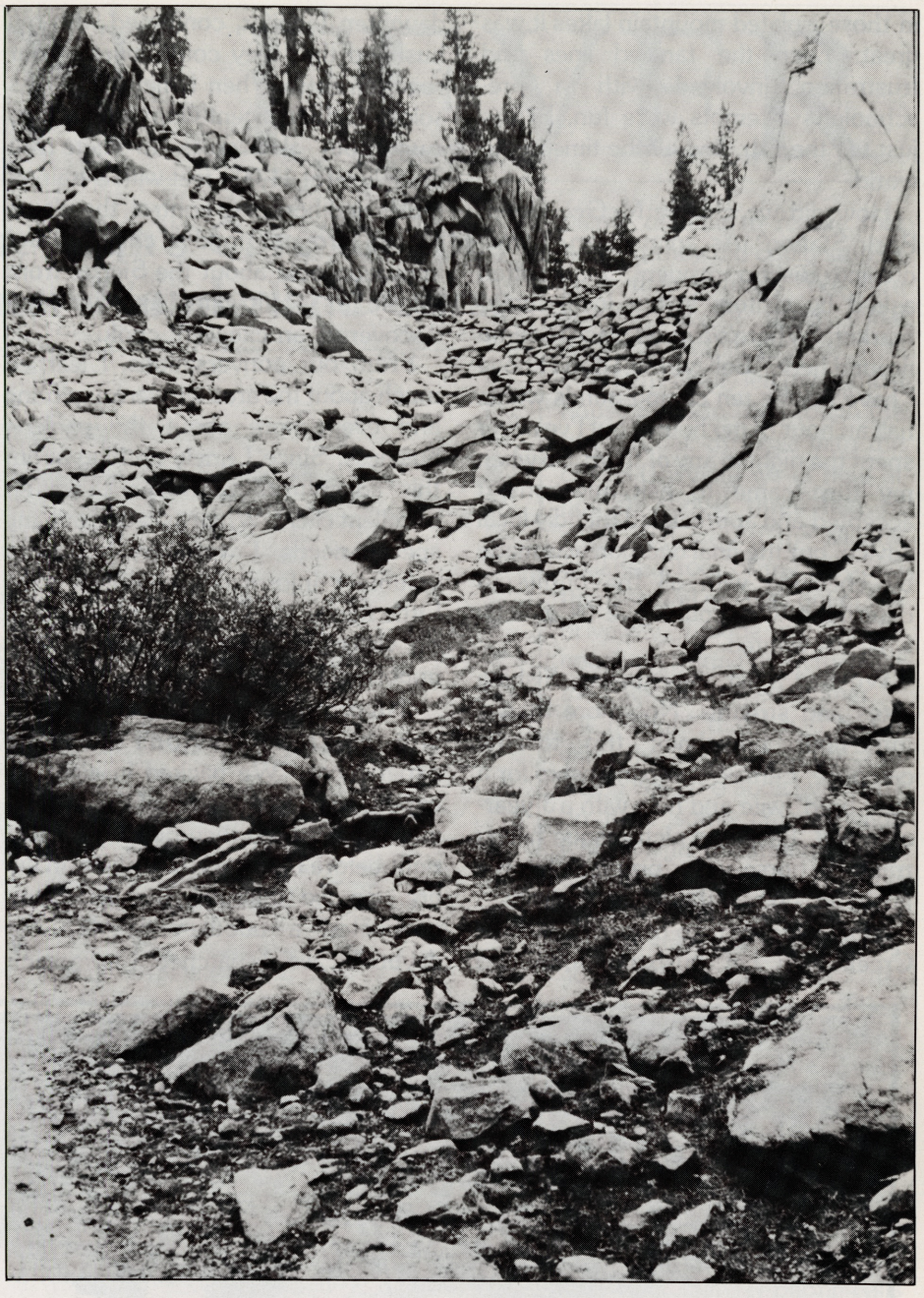
After The Chute, the trail became more civilized again. We easily forded a couple of streams, but I no longer envied the pioneer woman. I started asking questions. Any more chutes? *No.* Are we coming back this way? *Yes.* Do I have to ride the horse DOWN the chute? *No, anytime you want to get off and walk, you can.* Are we almost there? *Almost.* And to myself: *What's a nice girl like me doing in a place like this?*

We arrived at camp, dismounted, and I found a flat rock on which to spread myself and watch the activities. Robby was led away, tied up and unsaddled. Our gear was unloaded.

I haven't really explained yet that our family had embarked on what is known as the "all-expense" trip. Most Sierra pack stations offer this type of service in addition to a variety of others. Depending on your reason for going, how experienced you are, and how much work you want to do, the packers can make arrangements. "All-expense" is king of contradictions: all the service of a grand hotel, but somebody forgot to build the hotel; Disneyland without tickets and lines; catered camping.

Our camp consisted of a big sleeping tent for us and smaller tents for the staff; a kitchen tent, which was large enough to be the dining room when we decided it was too chilly, too wet, or too mosquitoey; and the Blue Tent, appropriately set apart from the others providing privacy, a real seat, and a marvelous view of a waterfall. Over the ridge was the solar shower.

We unpacked our duffle bags between munches of crackers and dip, mixed nuts and other goodies. Lawn chairs were set up around the campfire. As the sun set, dinner was announced. Salad, then steaks smothered in mushrooms and onions, baked potatoes, hot garlic bread, wine, finally a creamy fruit-yogurt pie and coffee. Food worthy of the finest restaurant, served on real plates. We didn't have to make reservations, "dress" for dinner, nobody minded much when Daniel announced he didn't like sour cream and tossed a spoonful over his shoulder, and seconds on pie? Sure.



After dinner, we sat around the fire and heard "packer stories," with much better plots than anything on TV, which I feared I would miss, since I'm a TV junkie. This was the time for questions about the Sierra Wilderness, mapping out what we wanted to do, telling jokes, and by around 9 p.m., heading for the sleep tent.

Sleep came fast. That first night, I was a little embarrassed to ask, "What do I sleep in?" Most adults should know, shouldn't they? I figured the high altitude would make for sub-freezing nights, so I settled down in about four layers of clothing, judiciously removing my boots before attacking the sleeping bag zipper. By the second night, I was "experienced" enough to know that long johns were all that's necessary, and a lot more comfortable!

About our days, we started every morning with a cold splash of water and a ready hot cup of coffee. After breakfast, water heated over the fire provided a good wash-up before beginning that day's adventure. Yes, it rained. That was clean-up-the-tent time. Then we hiked, took day trips on the horses, or just sat around reading, playing cards or talking. We alternately applied suntan lotion, mosquito repellent, and itch medicine.

I learned to fish. I had never thought of fishing as particularly interesting, but

in those isolated mountain lakes it was great. Even the tangled lines and frustration involved with a pre-schooler's attempts were fun. It was just us, the fish, and all the time in the world.

How did we choose McGee Creek Pack Station? As an ordinary home-owning Bishop resident, I am often asked by visitors in our local supermarket, "Where's a good place to camp around here?" Believe me, I don't know! I have maybe ten campgrounds within half an hour of my house, but I've never spent the night in any of them. So when my turn came to ask questions, I accepted and appreciated friendly local advice, but the final decision was made by checking with all the outfits to determine who could give us exactly what we wanted.

We had a list: All-expense. Fishing lakes and streams. Not more than a three-hour horseback trip to the campsite. Female companionship for a "city-bred" wife and help with a 3-year-old child. Easy and picturesque hiking trails. A horse with "pizzazz" for the husband, one "without" for the wife.

Suzy Ketcham, co-owner of McGee Creek with her husband John and daughter Jennifer, confirmed with my husband that they could meet all our requirements. When I met her, I was sold — an intelligent woman, quick to laugh, but also quick to mete out discipline (at 11,000 feet with a train of mules and horses to control, there's no messin' around), fond of children, and knowledgeable about the Sierra, from wildlife to wildflowers. And we soon discovered, an excellent cook.

From our conversations, I learned much about the area we were exploring and even more about the packing business. Since I knew nothing about this "adventure," it turned out I was an excellent client. When asked about any special needs, I was very willing to volunteer information, however silly. Little things, like Daniel needing catsup on virtually everything, became very important.

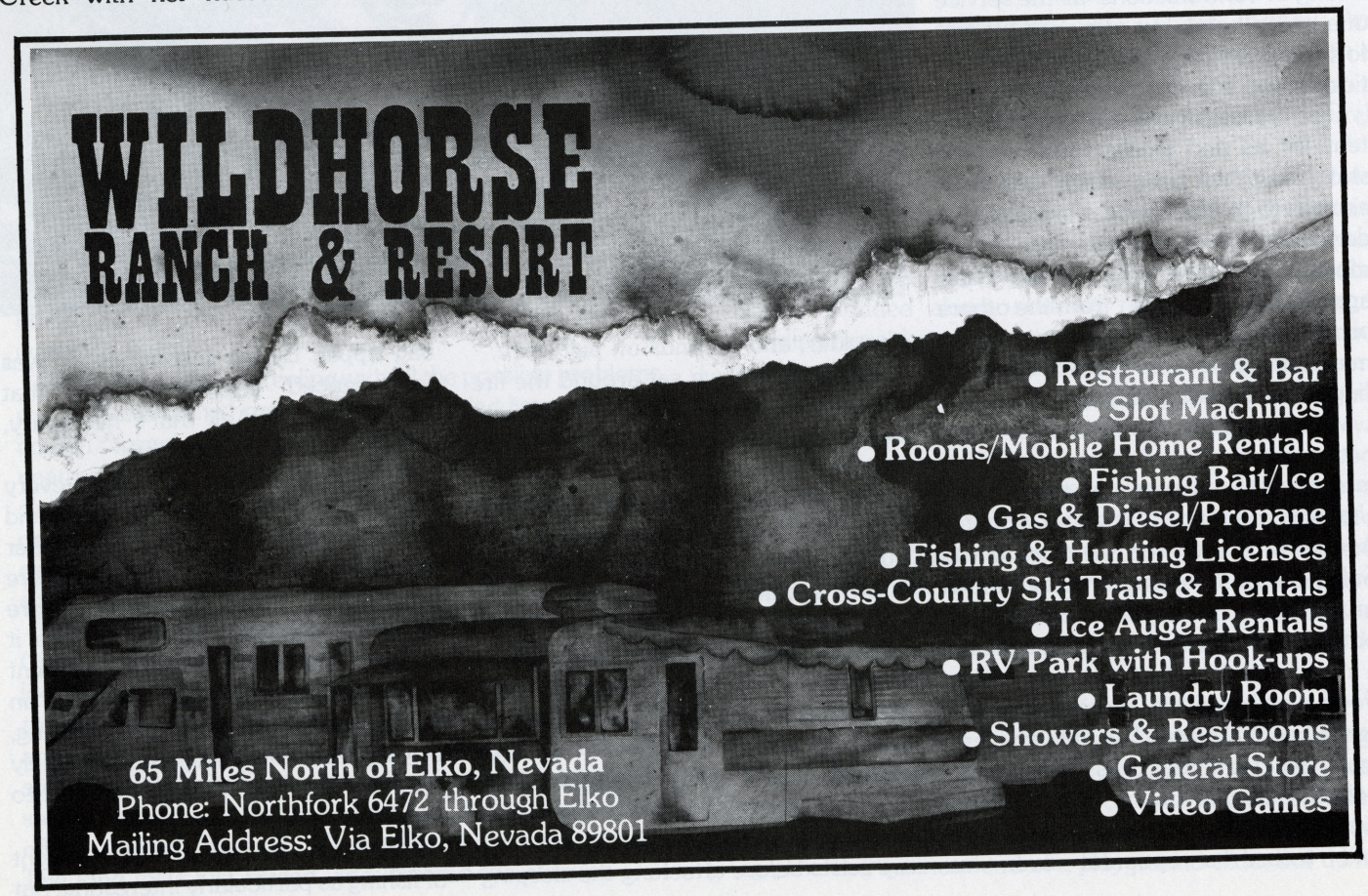
"No problem," chuckled Suzy, when she related previous packing experiences. "We packed in eight all-expensers six hours out of the station, and I discovered they didn't eat meat right before I popped the steaks on the fire. So we built up the salad and concocted a noodle-vegie dish. At daybreak, we dispatched a horse and mule with a new menu, and sent the guys off fishing with lots of fruit and egg salad sandwiches. By sunset, everything was fine. No problem."

I had thought packing was a loose and easy business. Never. The organization involved would tax the largest computer system!

The morning of our last day dawned. The mules arrived to take everything back. Our Wilderness experience was ending, and I was sorry to go. I had forgotten my concerns about the lack of electricity, TV, and even horseback riding. I was a little sunburnt, and my knees ached, but I felt relaxed and happy.

Now it's nine months since that trip, time to sign up again. Oh, how I wish we could. It was time well spent together as a family, away from all the distractions of our regular daily activities. But we've decided our newborn daughter Sarah isn't quite ready. Next year, for sure.

Suzy Ketcham shared herself and her joy of the High Sierra with thousands of friends and clients before her untimely passing this last winter. I couldn't exclude her from my story, any more than all the people who have known her can remove her memory.
M.T.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CABIN FEVER

One Man's Cure for the Winter Wonderland Curse

by Hank Levine

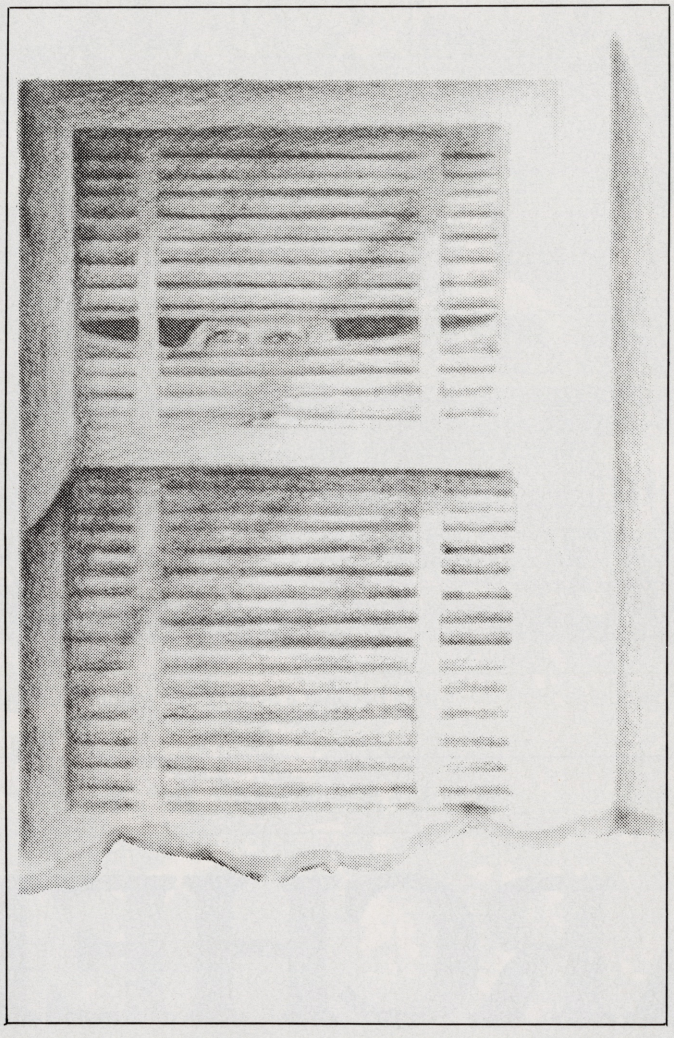
Since the discovery of the electric blanket, there has been a tendency to live where one does not belong. As soon as the electric blanket appeared in the Sears catalog, people began migrating to the snow country. I'm not talking about areas that receive just a foot or two of snow each year. A little snow can be fun. There is nothing like a good snowball fight to relieve hidden frustrations; snow angels have a certain aesthetic beauty. No, I'm talking about the country where that miserable, cold white stuff falls and falls and falls, and the sun is often obscured for months at a time.

I once went to visit some friends who live in a small mountain community near the famous encampment of the Donner Party. The directions to their house seemed straightforward enough: "Turn left off Highway 50, then make a right turn. My house is the fifth one on the right."

"What color's the house?"

"Can't remember. Just look for the fifth driveway."

I should have gone to the beach instead.



Once I got there I found that I had to climb down to the third story window. Even the peak of the roof was buried in snow. Of course, it started to snow right after my arrival and it didn't stop during the next three days. The only reason that it finally stopped was that a warm front passed through the area, and the snow turned to rain. It wasn't until the next day that the rain stopped falling. Immediately, temperatures plummeted.

We hurried to the corner cafe, where the hostess had the table next to the front window waiting for us. The fun began instantaneously. It seems that cars are not meant to be driven on ice. We spent most of the day sipping wine, eating chocolate eclairs, and watching the cars slide their way into an early grave. It really was quite amusing. The cars appeared to move in slow motion as they slid into one another. They moved so slowly, in fact, that the drivers had plenty of time to realize that nothing they did could stop or steer their vehicles. We sure saw a lot of great facial expressions that day.

When I finally left my friends' house I had to go through the usual ritual. Struggle with the chains (they always fit right at home), shovel three feet of snow and ice off the slightly collapsed roof of my car, and then, shovel my way out of the driveway. I bade my friends goodbye, asking them to invite me back up in the summer.

I thought that I had had it with the snow country, but skiing is so-o-o addictive, and I do have some crazy friends who live in the mountains; it wasn't long before I found myself back in the cold.

I was staying with some very good friends at one of my favorite ski resorts. Their telephone kept ringing and the same conversation always took place:

"Yes, I remember you. How are you? I'm sorry, I've already got company this weekend. Oh, the skiing has been great. Well, it was good to hear from you. Bye." Similar phone calls seem to plague everyone who lives near a big ski resort. I asked my friends how they coped. They giggled, obviously wondering whether to let me in on their little secret. They finally spilled the beans. A good friend calls, and they are almost always invited to stay a few days. More often, it is acquaintances, or acquaintances of acquaintances. They are usually told that somebody is already staying for the weekend. Periodically, an acquaintance with a certain amount of class or money is invited up. The directions are always the same: "We have a big front porch. The car is right in front. Can't miss it." Pretty simple sounding, except that there is almost always ten feet of snow in the front yard, totally obliterating any signs of the porch and car.

Friday nights, the family gathers in front of the stove, which is strategically placed in front of the large picture window. An entertaining evening is spent watching the cars

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The double fireplace, which became a symbol of Parcher's Camp.

THE HISTORY OF

PARCHERS resort

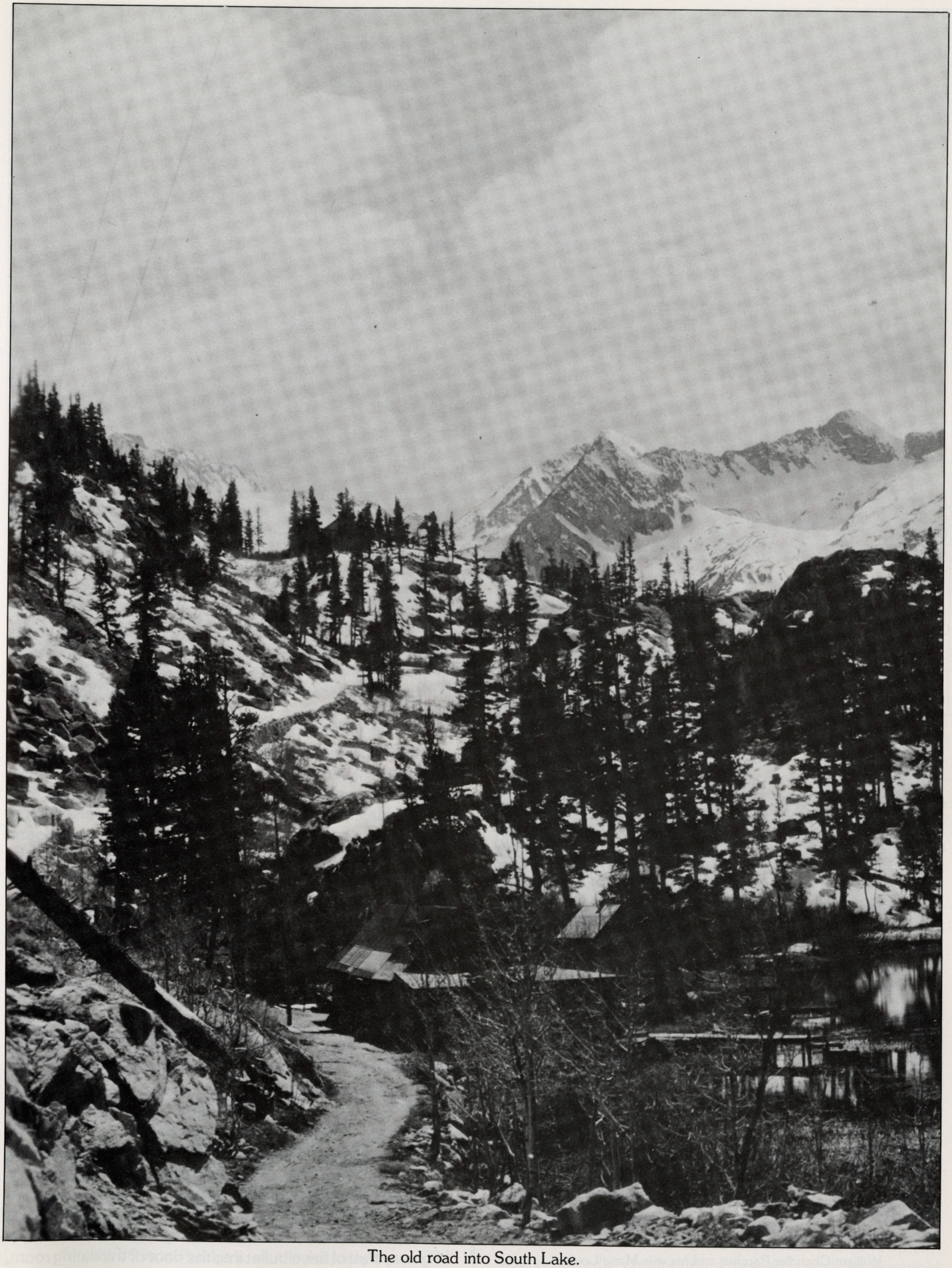
by Marty Forstenzer

The serene, picturesque setting of Parcher's Resort, on the south fork of Bishop Creek, has attracted thousands of guests in its 63-year history. Originally named Parcher's Rainbow Camp, the resort has been a resting place for noted celebrities, and has also been the scene of some unlikely, tumultuous events. Over the years, it has survived the ravages of the elements, wild animal attacks, and the United States Army.

The site where Parcher's Resort now stands was originally a campground, built as an addition to Andrews Camp, where a pack outfit operated. In those days, it was used as a rest-over site for extra pack strings.

Parcher's Rainbow Camp was built in the early 1920s by William Chandler Parcher and his wife Marie Louise. His intention was to build a resort in a wholesome environment where people could bring their families, and get away from the city.

W.C. Parcher, as he was known, had been in the



The old road into South Lake.

Homestead cabin at Andrews Camp, built by W. Coats. 1885.

newspaper business in Southern California, working for the **Los Angeles Times** and later publishing his own paper, **The Hollywood Citizen.** In 1911, he moved to the Owens Valley and bought the **Owens Valley Herald.** He later sold the **Herald** and acquired the **Inyo Independent,** while Marie wrote a column for **The Inyo Register.** In 1921, when Parcher decided to build his mountain resort, he began scouting in the Big Pine Creek area. He later decided on Bishop Creek as an attractive and practical place for a resort.

William Chandler Parcher and his wife Marie Louise.

Located on the shore of South Lake, Parcher's original resort was constructed of wooden floors with attached frame tents. The lumber came from the Hotel Istalia which was located on Main Street in Bishop where Safeway now stands. He also built a small cook shack and a building that was used as a recreation room. The Parchers soon found that location less than ideal since strong winds off the lake regularly blew the tents from their wooden frames.

Eventually, the frame tents were replaced by cabins, and the resort acquired a more permanent and comfortable aspect. One of the 'items' Parcher had brought over from the Hotel Istalia was a parrot. He had picked up a few bad habits from his previous owners. One of his favorite sayings was, "I don't like this coffee!" A well-remembered incident occurred one night at the main lodge, as a Hollywood director vacationing there got up to leave, announcing, "I'm going up to bed." The parrot quickly returned, "Well, I'm *damn glad of it.*"

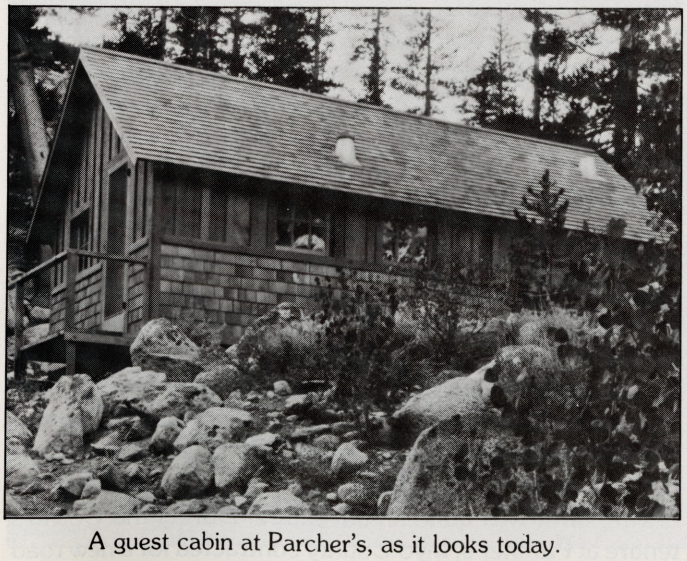
W.C. Parcher was always trying to make the camp more colorful and interesting for his guests. He held talent evenings, with guests telling stories, singing, or creating dramatizations. Mrs. Parcher managed to have a small branch of the Inyo County Library established at the resort.

Parcher's attempts to provide amusement for his guests were always colorful. He had the Captain of the California Highway Patrol fire a bullet into the door of the dining room,

Ward Parcher, Bob and Dolores Hope, Hazel Chamberlain, and Mrs. Shipstad at Parcher's Camp.

letting the guests draw their own conclusions as to how it got there. When famous climber Norman Clyde was staying at the resort, Parcher arranged for a woman to pretend to become stuck on a nearby cliff. When the woman screamed, Clyde climbed to her rescue, while the guests watched in amazement.

After W.C. Parcher's death, the resort was taken over by his two sons, Ward and Frank. Ward managed it with their mother until her death.



A guest cabin at Parcher's, as it looks today.

Among the celebrities who were guests were the Shipstads, of the Shipstad and Johnson Ice Follies. Their friend Bob Hope and his family came to the camp with them one summer. Comedian Stan Laurel spent two weeks at Parcher's Camp; Louise Parcher Bollinger, W.C.'s granddaughter, describes him as a very serious man who never cracked a smile. "He stayed very much to himself," she says. "He used to spend a lot of time hiking around the mountains, all alone."

The 1940s brought one of the most unlikely chapters in the Parcher's Camp story. The U.S. Government sent a representative to talk with the Parcher Camp owners, and appealing to their patriotism, asked them to lease the resort to the government for use as a missile test base. The Camp was apparently valuable, because at that time, South Lake was the highest elevation in the United States to which heavy vehicles could be driven. The resort was to be used to house men working at a missile test site at South Lake. The owners agreed, cancelling all their reservations and leasing Parcher's Camp to the U.S. Government for two years.

The testing done was related to the work at the White Sands Proving Ground in New Mexico. The government was reportedly conducting a research and development

The Bear that attacked Parcher's Camp in 1960, causing considerable damage.

program to test rockets at high altitudes. Although one report says that the work involved only "static" testing, another maintains that missiles were not only fired, but that one missile misfired and was never found. There are said to be launching pads remaining today under the blacktop at South Lake. Among the scientists present at South Lake was famed German-American missile expert Wernher Von Braun.

When the owners returned to the Camp, they were distressed to find considerable damage. Sadly, the natural wood walls had been whitewashed, as were authentic wagon wheels which had been used as chandeliers. Counters had been ripped out, the floors had been oiled, and some valuable antiques in storage there were reportedly stolen. Louise Bollinger refers to those days as "the blackest period of Parcher's Camp."

In 1956, Ward Parcher sold Parcher's Camp to Chuck and Gloria Colvin of Los Angeles. Although he had never been to South Lake, Colvin had been to Lake Sabrina many times. He heard about Parcher's Camp from a friend who had stayed there, and when Ward went to Los Angeles to discuss the sale of the resort, Colvin bought it sight unseen.

Gloria Colvin recalls that there were countless inspectors to be dealt with when they took over the resort, because it was the first time Parcher's Camp had changed hands outside the Parcher family.

The Colvins immediately began to make improvements at the property. They put sinks with hot water in all the cabins, which previously had been provided only with outside cold water.

At the time the Colvins took ownership of Parcher's Camp, the electric power supply was drawn from a water-wheel built on Green Creek, and there was only gas refrigeration. The electric power was erratic; lights would fade and brighten — quaint, but undependable. Chuck Colvin built a hydroelectric plant, a difficult task because the materials and equipment had to be packed on mules up the very steep grade behind the Camp. Among other improvements undertaken by the Colvins were the building of two new cabins, refinishing of existing cabins, and remodeling and improvement of the restaurant and store.

In those days, the only phone service to the Camp was a thirteen-party line, which didn't allow for much privacy. Mrs. Colvin recalls that anything said over the line was soon common knowledge all over town. Also, the phones were the hand crank type, which could deliver a potent shock to anyone using them during a lightning storm!

The only road into South Lake then was a narrow, treacherous dirt road that climbed up one steep canyon then down the next canyon into the Camp. By all accounts, driving on it was quite an adventure. During the Colvin's tenure at Parcher's, Inyo County contracted for a new road

The main lodge was destroyed by snow in 1969. Today, the fireplace and chimney are all that remain.

to be built into South Lake. The new road became an adventure, too, since during its construction, nearly every window at Parcher's was shattered by the shock of dynamite blasts, and many rocks dislodged by the blasting came crashing through the roofs of the cabins.

The Colvins were host to actor Sterling Hayden, who brought his two children to the resort, and to actress Mariette Hartley.

Gloria Colvin tells of one Beverly Hills couple who came to Parcher's to see the 'back country' they had heard about, and hired a Camp employee as a guide. She recalls, "They were just going to a nearby lake. I was working in the store that day, and there were some men sitting around drinking beer, when the lady came in and asked for some bait for fishing. When I got her a box of worms, she said, 'Oh, no. I only want one!' The men spit out their beer, from laughing so hard."

(Following page) The headquarters building in the 1920s. At right are Marie Louise Parcher, granddaughters Louise and Harriet, and W.C. Parcher.

MEALS
PARCHERS CAMP

TEAM BOARDING
RAINBOW CAMP
BISHOP CREEK, BISHOP

1960 was the year The Bear attacked Parcher's Camp. That October, while Chuck Colvin was closing the camp for the winter, he saw a huge animal run across the road. Because bears on the East Slope are almost unheard of at that time of year, no one believed him. But it was not only a bear, it was a big and hungry bear.

In the few months it roamed through the deserted canyon searching for food, the bear caused considerable damage. It entered cabins at Parcher's Camp and surrounding areas, smashing windows and ransacking cabins. With its claws, it reportedly ripped refrigerator and freezer doors off their hinges. According to Jim Brock of Bishop, "it tore open canned hams and ate them, and attacked cans like Popeye, squeezing them until they popped open." In one cabin at Parcher's, the bear ate some red and green Epsom Salts, then left a red and green trail of digested salts behind. It is even reported that the bear broke the tops off some whiskey bottles and drank the whiskey, although there is another report that he may have been 'framed' by some men who reached the cabin later.

Word of The Bear reached Bishop on the day after Thanksgiving. Some men picked up its tracks at the Bishop Creek Lodge, and one of them shot it soon afterward. It took six men to load the bear into a truck, and it was weighed at 620 pounds, still the California state record. The Bear today stands mounted in the window of Brock's Sporting Goods in Bishop.

The winter of 1969 is a fabled one in the Owens Valley, because that year the Eastern Sierra registered its heaviest snowfall in modern history. The snowfall was responsible for widespread damage, and Parcher's Camp was no exception. The eleven-foot pack crushed the roofs of several buildings, never built to withstand that much weight. The main lodge was completely destroyed, leaving only the double fireplace intact, as it remains standing today.

In 1983, the present owners, Howard and Mary Shaw, took possession of Parcher's Camp. Howard, a successful Marin County businessman, says that he has enjoyed backpacking in the Eastern Sierra for several years, and decided to buy the resort when it became available. The Shaws have taken a great interest in the history of Parcher's, and Mary has spent much time collecting stories and photographs of the resort's past.

They are both very concerned about preserving the historic and environmental characteristics of the resort. For example, in repainting one of the cabins, Howard directed the workmen to leave a space unpainted where some of The Bear's claw marks remain. He explains, "Mainly, we want to fit into that beautiful canyon setting. We want to improve our ability to serve the public, without altering any of the essential features of the place."

And perhaps one of those 'essential features' is *events*, in the finest tradition of W.C. Parcher. One of the most bizarre incidents in the resort's history took place only last August. As the restaurant was closing, two men sat down at the counter, and were noted to be acting strangely. Soon, another man entered and began hollering at the two, then chased them as they ran out the back door.

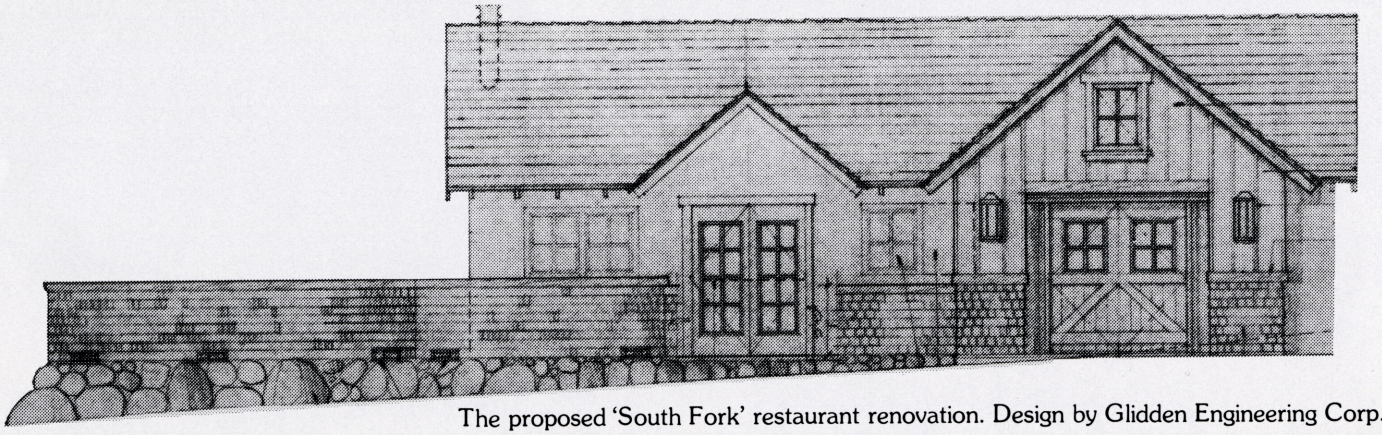
To the shock of employees and guests, gunshots were soon heard outside, followed by the firing of tear gas cannisters. Those present were naturally alarmed, until it became known that the National Guard was conducting war games in the area. Some bystanders were hit with tear gas. A south Florida doctor, vacationing at Parcher's, sums up their shock: "It was pure hell. We thought we were as good as dead!"

An Army spokesman said of the war games participants, "Give them an 'A' for initiative and enthusiasm, and an 'F' in smarts." The incident was reported in the **Los Angeles Times,** and as far away as the **Miami Herald** and **The Washington Post.**

The Shaws have plans for a number of improvements at the property, which they have renamed Parcher's Resort. This summer, they intend to build a new store and office building, remodel and enlarge the restaurant, and build a new rental cabin. In the future, they expect to build a new lodge around the old double fireplace, and add several more cabins.

Parcher's Resort is also establishing itself as the base for several seminars and workshops to be offered to the public. Among those offered this summer will be an Orvis flyfishing school, ornithology and wildflower tours led by noted experts, and a photography workshop.

It is gratifying to those familiar with the Parcher's Camp history that the new ownership maintains a respect for the historic and natural attributes of the resort. Says Howard Shaw, "We want to keep the feeling of a rustic, casual place with a friendly atmosphere and warm hospitality. We're intent on preserving the environmental characteristics, and also, on preserving the best of the past." □



The proposed 'South Fork' restaurant renovation. Design by Glidden Engineering Corp.

Diary of a Country Woman

by Jane Fisher

Today I picked up a newspaper and was stunned to see a photo captioned ". . .a training exercise. . . cooperative effort between the Forest Service and the local volunteers. . . involved the burning of an old cabin on Forest Service property scheduled for demolition."

I'd like to tell you about that "old" cabin. It stood in stately dignity above a long slope, perched high on sturdy, peeled-log poles and a boulder the size of a small house. It was two stories tall, with windows wrapped around the curving front. In summertime, green sunlight filtered through pines and glittering aspen to fall in pools of warmth on faded Turkish carpets that covered the huge living room floor. It was not a modern contractor's masterpiece of mass production, but it was striking enough to be the setting for some episodes of a television series. Every nail and board, every bright section of wallpaper and listing door sill, every amateur stroke of varnish had been painstakingly and enthusiastically put together by one family.

When we came down the trail from Fern Lake or Yost, we paused at the switchback to look down with pride on the beautiful roof, covered with hexagonal shingles in yellow and red. Our hearts were warmed by the sight of home and the knowledge that, even though round little Mama had out-hiked and out-fished us, within minutes after we arrived, she would magically produce a blazing fire and good things to eat.

The Cabin

In the winter, ski clubs from the city often came to spend a weekend and we sat very still in the snow-brightened dark to watch deer come to the salt lick Dad had provided nearby. Blue jays and chipmunks competed for the feeding box and talked back and forth with Dad in strange chrestomathies. The family grew and ebbed and flowed with college and adventures, but the nucleus — home — was Mama and Dad and The Cabin.

The privilege of leasing the lot had come to Dad when he and Granddad were State Fish and Game wardens. Granddad Walters had been a leading conservationist in this area, responsible for donation of water rights and building of the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery, then continuing on to the construction of the Fern Creek Hatchery — long gone — near The Cabin site. But what began as a hundred-year lease from the state, suddenly became property of the federal government and, like many other P.I. (possessory interest) lessees, we were notified that masterplanning of wilderness lands had turned us into interlopers.

Government has a way of playing these funny games, using people as pawns in the trial and error moves of experts who seldom see the land they plan. Like the time a consultant put Mineral King in Inyo County. And the one that gave Mt. Whitney to someone else. Or the state engineer who recently established the City of Crestview and the City of Dunmovin. The land quickly became "theirs" just as Hot Creek has, and

Goodbye, old friend. . .

other lands from which we have been virtually banished by those who hold it in trust for us.

We struggled and clung on. Land trades only worked for public entities or immense land holders. Organizations formed to pursue the legalities of evicting P.I. lessees only aided commercial interests. When the sewer district was formed, it provided the final Catch 22. A lessee only paid to the edge of his property, the Forest Service "owned" the land between the sewer main and our location and it wasn't buying.

What was to be, was to be, we finally rationalized. Mountain people and backpackers all, we loved the wilderness. We would submit unselfishly and do our share to enhance, extend and preserve it. The wilderness turned out to be a group camp with chains and iron gates that resembled a garbage dump much of the summer. The wilderness across the street was subdivided with charming chalets perched on every outcrop. The wilderness in the meadow where the wild iris had bloomed, where we had waded deep in fragrant grasses and watched the fish in the clear streams on our way home from Sunday School, became commercial developments on both sides of the road. The wilderness of pines and ferns through which we walked to school mushroomed with cabins, restaurants and rentals.

All was not lost, yet. Kind persons in various agencies recognized that, although Mama and Dad were not allowed to live in The Cabin year around, it was their only real home. They were granted permission to lease the land for as long as Dad lived.

But we lost Mama, too soon. The ambience of firelight, lamplight and loving welcome blinked out for us all. Little by little, the second generation of the Fairfield branch crept back and were finally authorized by Dad to be responsible for The Cabin on his behalf. It didn't take long, however, for those who demonstrate citizenship in this country by defiling it, to discover The Cabin was unoccupied for weeks at a time.

At first, only wintertime squatters broke in. Then the antique stove and chairs that had come to Granddad's ranch by ship in the 1800's vanished. We were advised they were ensconced in a red-light "ranch" in Nevada, but that nothing could be done about it. Indeed, nothing was, and before long someone filled every bedroom with wood, nailed the windows shut and camped on boards in the living room, with sleeping bag, guitar and dog.

Last spring, Dad announced that his courage was high, and painful though it would be, he intended to spend the summer at The Cabin. We cheered and promised to come, to bring the children, to try hard to create home one more time. We promised lots of hard work and loud laughter to hide the agony of loss. But it was too late.

The poles that braced the two-story living room ceiling against the weight of the snow, it was reported, had been "cut up for firewood." The front had caved in, and folks had helped themselves to almost everything moveable, including our beloved, immense, black Home Comfort cookstove that had warmed our dinners, our coffee, our backsides, our bathwater and our hearts for five generations. The Forest Service judged things beyond repair and served final notice to vacate and remove.

Goodbye, old friend. No one told us you were to be publicly burned. It seems a terrible waste. □

My heart still sleeps in the red fir forest
and the wind sings
ocean songs over the top.
Moonsilver threads through blue green lace
and burns through the shadow of ferns
and the wraith of a face.

Yesterday's storms ride bitter and wild,
singing of salt stung memories.
Love's old pathways
lead through the mists to thee.

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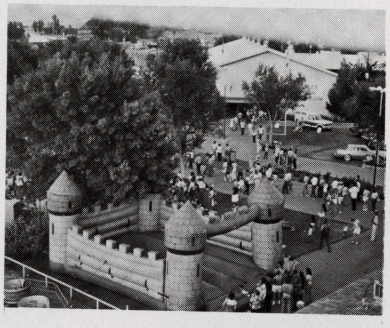
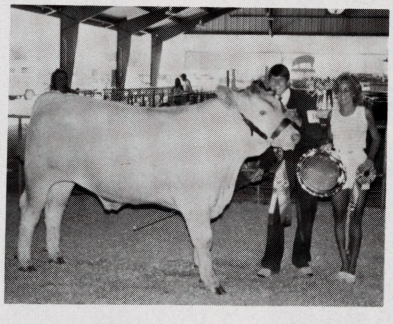


FUN GALORE IN '84



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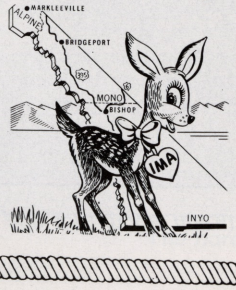

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July 12,-15th 1984
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THAT HARD WHITE WATER

by J.E. 'Aim Morhardt

Walking up toward Paiute Pass in a blizzard. No trouble with soft snow that day! Note the sectional tubes slung under the pack.

Man became an agricultural animal about eight thousand years ago. Since that time a good many of his grey hairs have been acquired because of the seasonal variation of a water supply with which to grow his crops. Sophisticated irrigation methods go back into the historical dawn when the Persians and Arabs dug tunnels under the desert from permanent mountain sources, taking the water on grade and without evaporation to their valley centers. Some of these aqueducts are still in use. At Gebel Nabta, near the Qattara Depression in Egypt, neolithic villagers of that very early time were already digging wells and planting barley. In our own land the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest irrigated intensively in prehistoric times, and the Pauite-Shosone of the Owens Valley each year flooded selected tracts of land for the communal growing of 'taboose,' a tuberous grass.

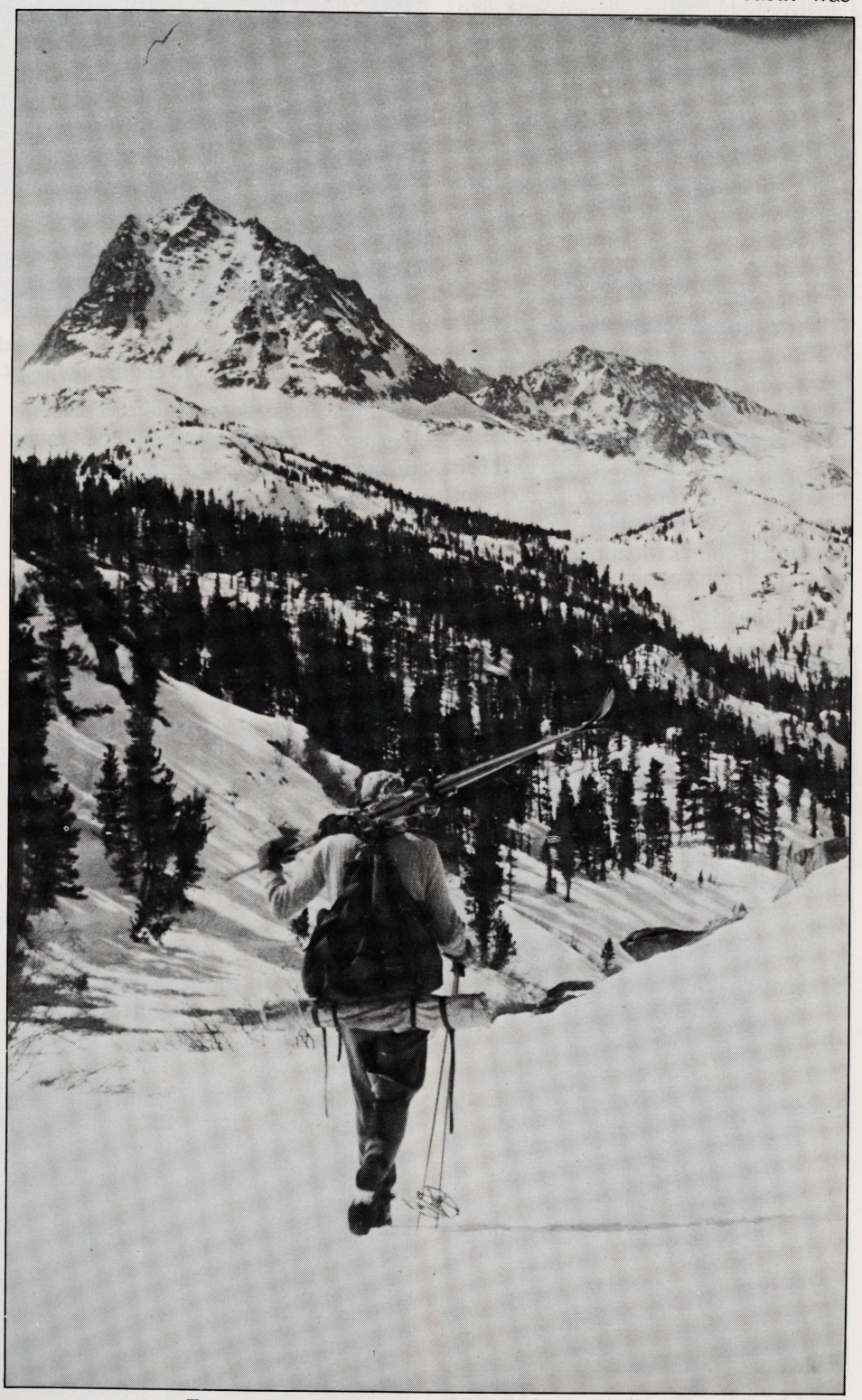
Water was not easily come by then in many places, and its lack worldwide is felt more each year with the burgeoning population and our wastefulness. Projections confirm that we are 'mining' our fossil water at an alarming rate; lowering the water tables through injudicious pumping although it is well known that aquifers so drawn down can only partially recover due to subsidence.

That 'Hard White Water' is, of course, snow, which, while it may inconvenience some and furnish sport for others, is one of Nature's primary blessings. Here in the Eastern Sierra we have been looking up at that white winter wall to the west every year for more than a century, seeking through folklore, local experience and hope to estimate the next summer's yield in water.

One is reminded of the story of the old Indian who was predicting a hard winter. On being asked for the basis of his knowledge he said, "White man cut lots of wood." In the Bishop area, old-timers still look at Matlick's Rock in March. This tremendous boulder can easily be seen in late winter when the snow still cloaks the 7500-foot level of the large alluvial fan area in the first canyon north of Horton Creek on Mount Tom. In deep winter the rock is hidden, but as the snow pack melts it is the first spot to appear on that pristine slope. Depending on the date of its appearance one can purportedly estimate the spring run-off.

Since Los Angeles built the first aqueduct to transport Owens Valley water to the dry Southland, increasingly careful measurements have been carried out, for the look of the snow tells too little of its substance. In the middle '40s, I had the pleasure of accompanying Fred Mechel of the U.S. Forest Service in snow surveys over Paiute and Bishop passes, the latter being a two-day job.

We went on skis those years, using 'skins' when the surface was soft and hoofing it at the higher elevations where the snow was frozen. A cabin was



The hard way over Paiute Pass in the mid-1940s.
Photo by 'Aim Morhardt.

provided in the Dusy Basin on the other side of the pass for our overnight use, and it had what looked like a large wooden chimney extending far above its one room. In the summer the structure seemed absurd, but having clambered down it into the chilly cabin below, now completely covered by the snow, was an experience in instant claustrophobia. The silence was like that of an anechoic chamber and the blackness was absolute. Fortunately it became a bit more habitable after a light and stove were lit, and it certainly did beat sleeping outside!

The survey courses were set in open meadows, well marked by high poles, and our job was to jam our sectional aluminum pipe down to the earth beneath, then withdraw them and weigh the now snow-filled lengths. Subtracting tare from contents gave a figure which told quite accurately by table the water content of the pack in that particular spot. After our work was over, we had the pleasure of a wild run back from the top of the 12,000-foot pass, ending up far below at Plant Two and Dutch John's Meadow, which was often the trailhead at that time.

The Department of Water and Power

The only entry to the "tunnel cabin" in Big Pine Basin. Dept. of Water & Power photo.

Current installation showing solar cell panel and "snow pillow." Photo courtesy of Dept. of Water and Power

used those measurements and also, at that time, was hiring Bob Symons to fly their World War II P38 completely around that section of the crest from Mono Lake to Little Lake for a photographic survey. The specifications on this job stated that the photographs should encompass the snow areas from the tops of the peaks on down. Bob lured me into doing this once and gave me 15 minutes to acquaint myself with the procedure, which was largely a matter of proper orientation of the camera, a 4x5 Speed Graphic which, as I recall, had to be held at arm's length, which precluded ordinary sighting and a careful spacing of the shots to insure overlap. Since the plane was expensive to fly my orientation was brief, nor was I acquainted with oxygen gear.

Bob jammed me into the lonesome nosecone area of that hot job and took off before I was ready. By the time he got to Lee Vining at 15,000 feet a few minutes later, he could tell by my responses that I was beginning to suffer from anoxia, one of my hoses having pulled loose.

After instruction via earphone, I thought I was all right and happily snapped all the pictures. . . only to find to my chagrin later that I had got the camera elevation wrong and cut off all the crests. Those were the days!

Since then there have been some changes made, although I was assured by the experts at the Department of Water and Power that much of the work still demands skis and snowshoes and that the 'Santa Claus' chimneys are still around. Now, however, the transportation is easier in many areas. On the west side of the Sierra, Southern California Edison uses helicopters since the terrain is suitable for them; on the east side a snowmobile known as the 'Imp' is currently employed. South of Mammoth Lakes, the work is still done the hard way, as the country is too rough or dangerous for mechanical devices. More and more of the work is being performed without manpower except for periodic checking, in which the methods have not changed, the only difference being that now the sectional tubing is made of stainless steel rather than aluminum.

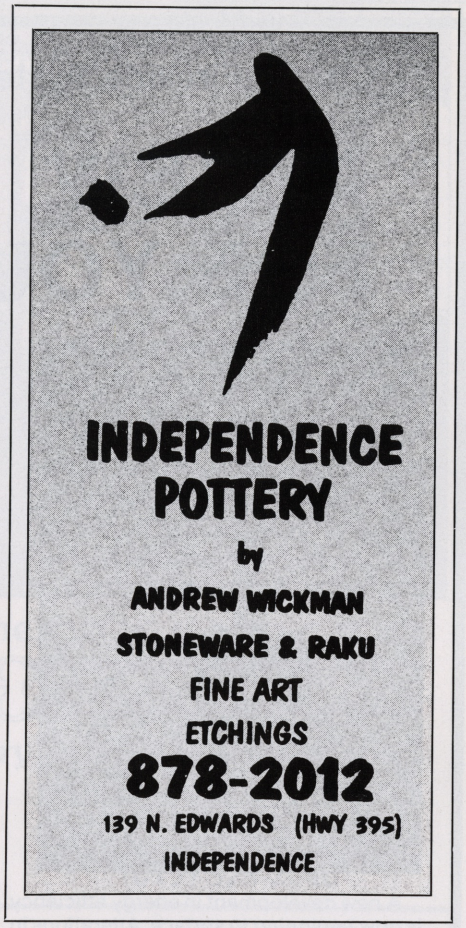
The new methods employ what is known as a 'snow pillow.' This device comes in two forms; one, a hexagonal sack of butyl rubber with a diameter of about 12 feet; the other, four hollow connected aluminum panels each about three by four feet. These 'pillows' are filled with a mixture of alcohol and water to a thickness of about one inch. As the snow builds up on them, the pressure of the weight displaces some of this liquid through a tube into what is called a 'stilling well.' This is a metal tube with a float. As water is pressed out of the pillow it raises the float (or lowers it if the snow later melts). A cable

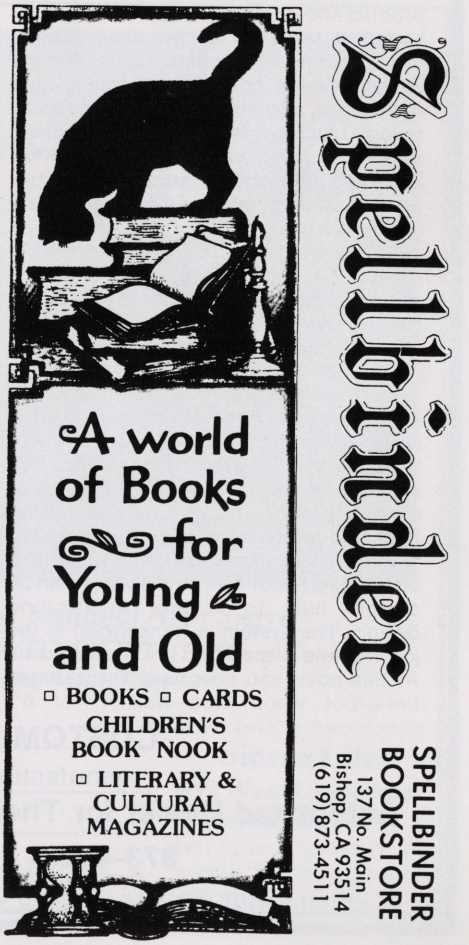
Metal 'snow pillow' being installed. Dept. of Water & Power photo

attached to the float runs over a shiv and is then connected electrically to a recording device of either a pen or punch pins and a tape. These results are then beamed out twice daily to a satellite as it passes overhead and are later retrieved at an appropriate ground station for interpretation. The entire installation is powered by a solar cell. Electronics has an answer for everything.

My informant, Jim Lee, on hearing that I had done it the hard way earlier, said that he still did on occasion, as one of the current overnight sites on Big Pine Creek is in a tunnel with a cabin-type entrance which has to be dug out on each trip. Electronics won't do that for you at any rate, so it's still hard work for Hard Water. □

Survey site under construction. Dept. of Water & Power photo.





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Many homes today are sealed too tightly, usually from over-insulating. This can be especially dangerous during the winter months because the interior air becomes dry and stagnant, which contributes to health problems and possible suffocation.

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from Down South cruise up and down the icy streets looking for the big front porch and car. They often pass the house 10 to 15 times before ending up at the local bar (the closest telephone).

"Sorry about the directions. snicker, snicker."

I once had a friend (and I purposely say that in the past tense), who was an avid skier. She took a bad fall one day and broke her leg. She was treated to a free helicopter ride back to Southern California. Since we were such good friends, and she knew that I like to ski, she bought me a plane ticket, with the understanding that I would pick up her car at the resort's main parking lot, take a few days of easy, fair-weather skiing (the only kind I do), and then drive the car back down south. Somehow it skipped both of our notices that it had snowed seven feet in the intervening week. When I got to the parking lot, it quickly became obvious that finding her car was going to be a herculean task at best. I made my way back to town to rent a metal detector, but ended up buying one instead. Two days and seventeen cars later, I found my friend's car. I received a five-minute standing ovation from the crowd that had gathered to watch my antics, plus I made $322 in gratuities for the digging out of other snowbound cars. This story seems to have a moral. If you have to go to the snow country, take one of those fancy ski buses.

After so many trips to the snow country, I began wondering what people did to entertain themselves during those long, cold winter days. I started talking to the people who live there and found they had a few common answers.

Cooking becomes a big to-do during the winter. A well thought-out feast can take two days to prepare, and another day to clean up, and outside of one trip to the market, you never have to leave the house. The real connoisseur has cooking down to such a science that every pot and pan in the house is used. This is very important, as clean-up time is extended. There is an unspoken rule in the snow country — the guest never helps with the clean-up.

Rich and poor alike treasure these cooking feasts. Bouillabaisse or potato soup, kale simmered in cream or baked carrots, herbed Paillard of Beef or

quiche, Penuche and Raisin Layer Cake or chocolate pudding, there are a few important tricks. It is best to have feasts more often than your friends (time spent driving around on slick roads is vastly reduced), and it is essential to make as big a mess as possible.

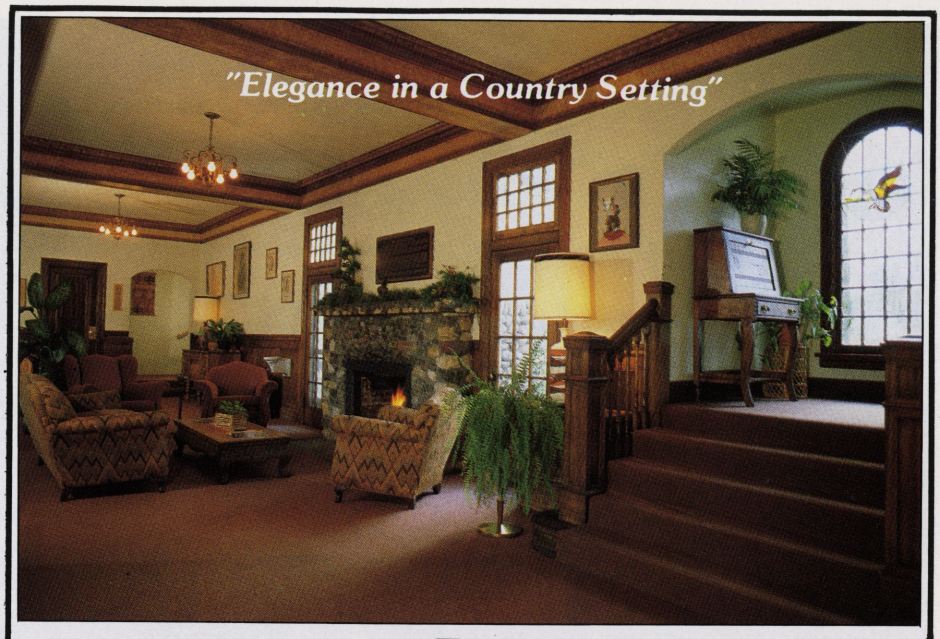
I also found that "lost and found" becomes a big factor in relieving cabin fever. This little game starts during the long, warm days of summer, but the meat of the game is not played until the cold, dark days of winter. The game itself is simple. Many participants set aside the Summer Solstice for the start; that day is spent rearranging the household cabinets. Special attention is placed on relocating small items that will be needed during the winter, commonly, these include extra car window scrapers, cookbooks and spare boot liners. Once winter arrives, many enjoyable hours are spent trying to find these items.

I have been told that being stuffed inside of a cabin all winter really isn't that bad as long as there is something to do to keep you occupied. I really hate to admit it, but I have spent lots of time in the high country hospitals (when am I ever going to give up skiing?), and while there became good friends with a number of doctors. They hinted at another conspicuously popular remedy to cabin fever: indoor sports. I have no personal knowledge of these sports, you understand, but it is quite coincidental that maternity wards at all snow country hospitals are filled to capacity every November and December. . .

Finally, a couple pieces of trivia. Alfred Hitchcock spent a lonely winter in a cabin high in the Colorado Rockies the winter "Psycho" was written. . . Gilligan's Island, Magnum P.I. and Fantasy Island are the most-watched television shows in the high country in winter. . .

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of being snowbound in winter is that imaginations tend to flow. I know. □

Hank Levine is Outdoor Editor for ***Sierra Life.*** *In addition to his writing duties, he is technical advisor for articles on outdoor activities. Hank is also an accomplished photographer, ski instructor and gourmet cook.*



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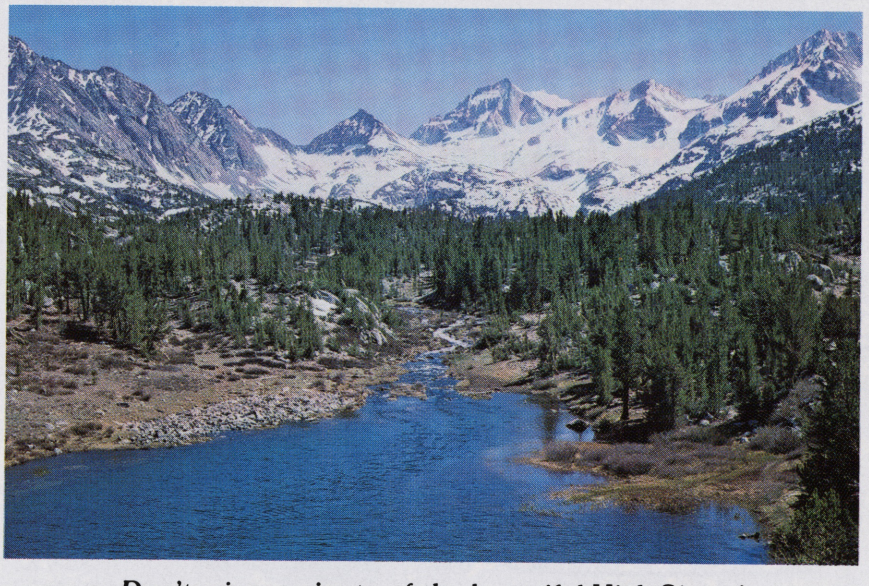

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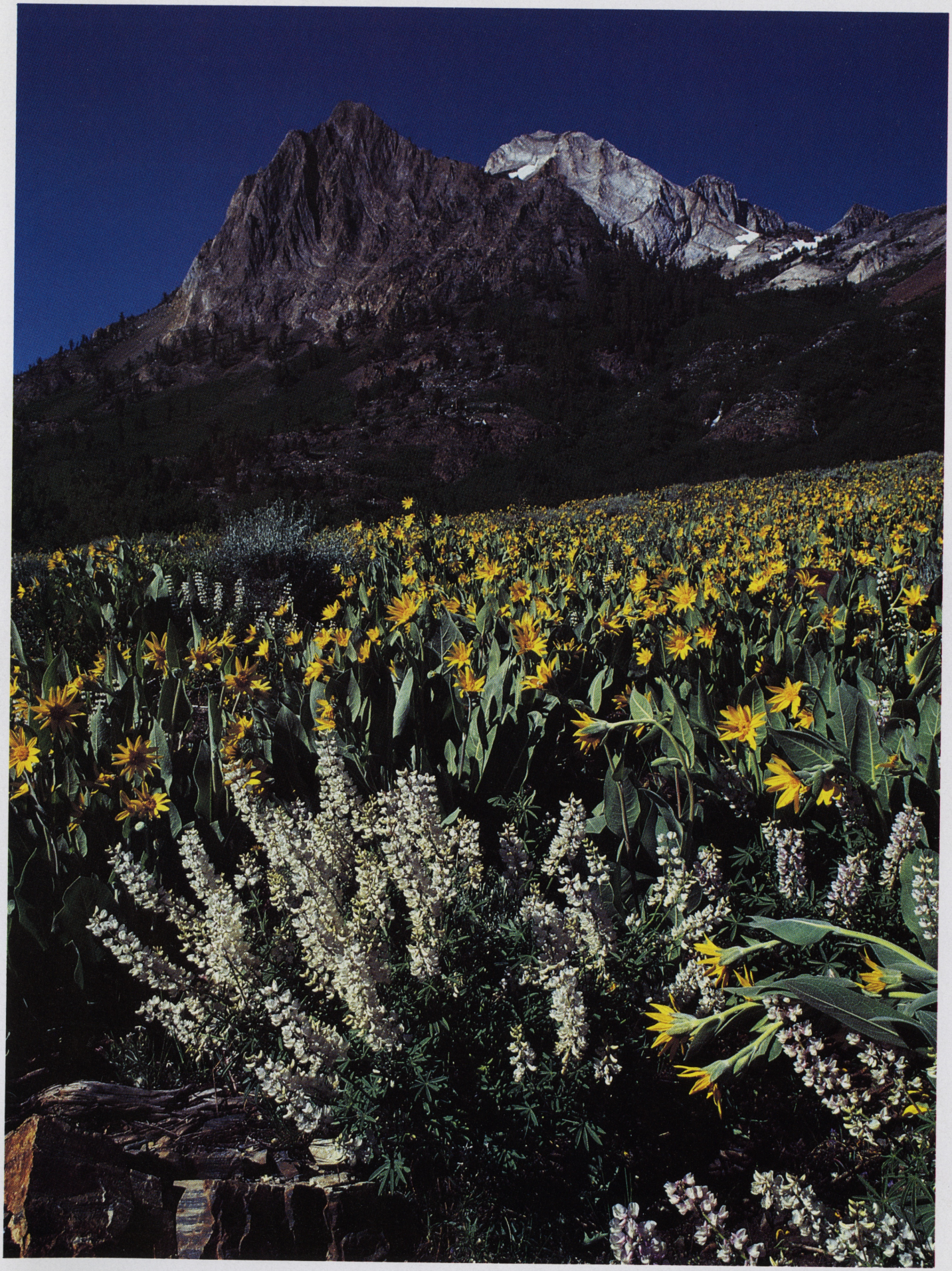

McGee Creek Canyon, photo by Jim Stroup.

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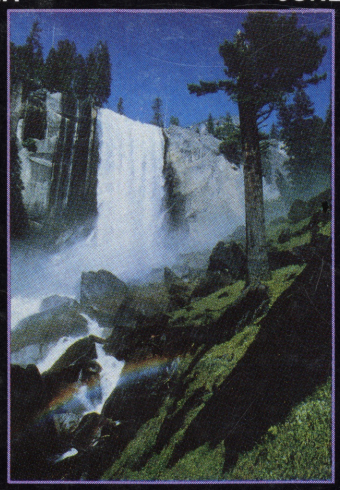

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